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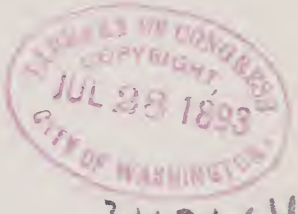
THE MASTER SOWER.

BY

REV. F. S. DAVIS, A. M.

The field is the world.

—MATT. XIII, 38.



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THE MASTER SOWER.

I.

SEED SOWN.

JESUS was always seeing and speaking of things in material nature that were significant of the spiritual kingdom of God. It was always a quiet recognition. It is one of the most natural processes for such a heavenly-minded being to see clearly what God means in all such things as the fields whitening for the harvest, the flowers filling the air with fragrance, the budding fig-tree, the vine with its clusters of fruit, and the *sowing of seed.* All these things the Christ wove into his talks about the progress of Christianity.

The principles of the Christian religion are strikingly like principles of germination and growth in material nature. Christian truths germinate, grow, and multiply in a single soul, and in the souls of the human race *en masse.*

Let us read the "Parable of the Sower" in the light of a multitude of events that have occurred in the religious history of this world since the first disciples listened to the Master:

"A sower went out to sow his seed; and as he

sowed, some fell by the wayside; and it was trodden down, and the fowls of the air devoured it. And some fell upon a rock; and as soon as it was sprung up it withered away, because it lacked moisture. And some fell among thorns; and the thorns sprang up with it, and choked it. And other fell on good ground, and sprang up, and bare fruit an hundred-fold."

The "seed" is the Christ-truth. The gospel of Christ is as seed sown that will grow in all fit places, and in due time—that is, Divine time.

The seed of the plant is one of the mysteries of material nature. It is one of the wonderful little things of earth. Take in your hand a mite of a seed, and think what a wonderful vitality is bound up in this little germ; what a multiplying force is imprisoned in this little cell; what juxtaposition of peculiar conditions does this seed require in order to exhibit the phenomena of growth! Many times longer than your hand will retain its grip on anything in this world may this seed lie unnoticed and unproductive, then burst into life over the long-forgotten graves of men who have lived and died.

The seed, so easily thrown away and wasted, is still a significant thing in God's method of natural reproduction. Things that grow have their germinal vitality. This is true of plants. It is true of animals. It is true of religious thought.

The Master Sower has sown broadcast the germs

of the religious truth that is to flourish in the life of the ultimate humanity of earth.

It is the manifest destiny of the Christian religion to overspread the whole earth. It offers healing for the heart of the human race, hurt by sin. It is consistent with the purest religious instinct of mankind. It satisfies the soul with a clearly defined God. It distinguishes the "seen" and the "unseen"—the knowable and the unknowable—the material and the immaterial—the holy and the unholy—the temporal and the eternal.

The religious design of the Christ is broad and deep. We, to-day, behold this divine design in clearer perspective than they who looked upon a picture in which the solitary figure of the Sower filled the foreground. The amazing course of rising civilizations was invisible to the early disciples. Deepest and strongest currents of human thought were utterly unknown to those who first circled around the Sower. Restatement after restatement of the doctrines of the Divine Teacher was to be made, until the length, breadth, depth, and height of the life-teaching should be manifest.

The early disciples could not clearly foresee the long succession of systems of infidelity to Christ-truth; but the Master Sower could sow the seed of religious truth, and foresee its growth, despite the shadow of error.

Christianity is the plant of the centuries most conspicuously divine of all things that are weav-

ing their growth within the growth of civilization. It is not denied that ugly weeds are growing in the midst of fairest flowers and choicest fruit of the grace of Christ. This needs not conceal from our eyes the stately growth of the fairest plant of earth. It should all the more excite our admiration that the Christ-plant "grows up a tender plant, and as a root out of a dry ground."

There are those who persistently sneer at all efforts to send the gospel to heathendom while there are so many unconverted sinners in Christendom. Herein is misconception of the design of the providence of God to sow the whole earth with the *seed* of gospel truth. There is misconception of the double process of the progress of Christianity: To spread over the world to become the world's religion; to approach the individual to characterize his personal religious life.

The missionary spirit of the Church aims to extend the territory of religious opportunity. It proposes to go into all the world, and preach the gospel to every creature. This missionary spirit is not to be subdued by the sneer that is born of misconception of the essential greatness of the religion destined for the whole world.

The man of mature Christian thought—in whose mind the Christ-truth has had a growth—is the last man to deny the existence of perplexing problems of human life on earth; but the settled conviction

of his soul is that *Christianity solves more of such problems than it creates.*

The Christ-plant in the process of unmistakable growth in the earth is throwing off excrescences of growth. Still, the evangelical Church is a mighty growth in the land notwithstanding the numerous specimens of Christians of stunted growth, whom the Church, like an indulgent mother, is patiently nursing. There is mistaken piety of the grossly ignorant suddenly translated from low and vulgarly vicious habits. There is mistaken piety of intelligent people who, while not thoroughly converted, feel bound to keep up a profession of piety. There is a so-called liberalism that strikes out of its interpretation of Christianity, vital doctrines that have been associated unfortunately with the abuses of ecclesiastical Rome, with the crudities of Protestant evangelism and with the abortions of evangelical Christian life.

There is a Christian consciousness of the present age that attests the development of Christianity in the life of mankind. Was it not a divine consciousness that gave such a wonderful poise to the mind of the man Jesus? That divinely poised mind calmly proclaimed the final triumph of a spiritual kingdom by means which could have been known only in a higher world, where God is nearer the consciousness of his creatures. Jesus has but a slight following of short-sighted disciples. He is

bitterly assailed by the prejudices of his nation, which have been strengthening for centuries, and may not yield for centuries to come. He is singularly misapprehended by the whole world. Still, he proclaims himself Ruler of a spiritual kingdom wherein love and faith are supreme principles, and men are put upon their honor as having to do with Him who is unseen.

The religious consciousness of our race becomes clearer and clearer by the thinking which the spirit of the gospel of Christ is compelling. Both the friend and the foe of the Christ must think.

There is a consciousness of Christian experience divested of the excessive supernaturalism that marked the pagan's sudden transition from his superstitions to his superstitious misconceptions of the aim of Christ. Men are stronger to-day through divine process of religious education. God trusts man even more in the appeal which Christianity makes to his moral wants and religious yearnings than when a physically miraculous interposition was made in the affairs of men and divinity was manifested in the visible man.

There is evidence of Christianity in the *consciousness of Christian life* blending harmoniously with all that is worthy and pure, promising in time and hopeful for eternity, in the history of mankind.

A religious movement keeping pace with the history of humanity of earth is viewed by the successive generations according to the spirit of their

respective ages. The movement lags during an age of natural retrogression; is accelerated during an age of quickened natural progress. The successive generations of men witness in Christianity the phenomena of religion for the world in every stage of its history and development, as well as religion for the individual at every step of his personal life.

II.

THE HEART WAXED GROSS.

THE seed sown in various soils does not invariably ripen into fruit of Christian character. There are conditions in which it does not grow at all. The fault of unproductiveness is not in the pure seed of Christ-truth, when it falls where there is no soil. A man's heart—out of which are the issues of his spiritual life—in some measure determines his acceptance or his rejection of the Christ-truth, when it is fairly presented to the attention of his moral nature.

The seed which Christ sows is not defective. The moral principles of the gospel are faultless. The faults which we recognize in men are not to be attributed to the original proclamation of the gospel by the Master, nor to any deficiency of the seed of divine truth which the Son of God is sowing in the hearts of men. Other sowers have mixed the seed of error with the pure seed sown by the Master Sower; and *error has its seasons of growth.*

In the Parable of the Sower, it was admitted in advance that a class of men on the earth would effectually resist the gospel of Christ, in so far as their non-resistance to evil prevents the moral renovation which the Savior proposes for free moral agents.

Thus says Christ: "As he sowed, some fell by the wayside; and it was trodden down, and the fowls of the air devoured it." Very much of the seed of divine truth is sown and wasted in gross or incorrigibly vicious hearts. It is not incredible in the circumstances of the case, that, as the Savior says, "to those by the wayside cometh the devil, and taketh the word out of their hearts."

The Savior thus describes the devil's opportunity: "This people's heart is waxed gross, and their ears are dull of hearing, and their eyes have they closed, lest at any time they should see with their eyes, and hear with their ears, and understand with their heart, and should be converted, and I should heal them." The hearts that have waxed gross open the wayside for Satanic influence, and viciously invite "evil ones" to help them against Christ.

The saying of Christ, "Then cometh the devil, and taketh the word out of their hearts," suggests a theory of evil simultaneously with the heavenly proclamation of salvation for man. Jesus Christ comes to earth with glad tidings of heavenly good for mankind. The heavenly truth meets the opposition both of earthly and of super-earthly evil. The Son of God inaugurates a spiritual kingdom. The records of the inaugural processes of this kingdom of Christ indicate commotion of an opposing diabolical kingdom. The reign of diabolism is opposed to the Son of God entering upon his kingdom.

There are "evil ones," decidedly averse to the

salvation of men. There is a kingdom of darkness, with a measure of power for evil. This much appears on the surface of the gospel records. Will it all disappear, as our eyes get accustomed to the Christ-light? Let us see.

Jesus believed in the existence of devils. The belief of Jesus is the knowledge of Jesus. He spoke of demoniacal possession of the spirits and bodies of men as matter of fact. His exorcism of evil spirits was not a solemn farce. He was not playing with the superstitions of men, and giving to this phase of his divine work a misnomer.

The dawn of the glorious Sun of righteousness on earth gave this lower world a glimpse of angels of heaven, singing triumphantly, "Glory to God in the highest." The advent of Christ's kingdom on earth gave a glimpse of Satan's kingdom of evil. For a short time the exultation of angels on high and the consternation of devils below were alike visible. The extremes of good and evil in the universe, for a moment—an era in the moral history of the universe—viewed each other with pity and hatred. A new world—the earth—had reached the crisis of its moral history.

The land chosen of God for the manifestation of the Son of God is the land chosen by Satan as the proper theater for demon manifestation. The nation chosen of God for the transmission of the body of his truth is the nation chosen by the adversary in which to organize the forces of evil. The Son of

God makes the fiercest hostility of demons against the truth the peculiar signal of their existence.

It is a fact that sin has repeatedly made devils of men on earth. Devils incarnate have hated moral goodness with all the malignity that may be attributed to fiends of hell. They have opposed with evil arts the purest principles of religion. They have applauded the basest and most destructive passions of the human soul at the point of the soul's most humiliating moral degradation. At the instigation of these human devils, vice and cruelty have tortured humanity. Belief in the existence of devils within the sphere of human life and beyond, is forced upon the soul that has made a desperate struggle for true life.

The animus of the effectual resistance of men against Christianity ceases to be a secret when laid bare by the Revealer in words which expose the resister's success as his shame: "His heart has waxed gross."

It is no triumph for *men* that animalism has rendered the human soul so gross that no fine image of Christ is impressed therein. It is a shame to have no sensitiveness of spirit for moral purity. It is a natural degradation for a human creature to quench spiritual aspirations and to permit deterioration of the texture of his soul by gross indulgence of his appetites.

The Divine Author of the Scriptures might have given still plainer evidence of their divine

authority. As men's ears became dull of hearing, and their eyes closed, the voice of Jehovah might have sounded louder, and divine appearances might have been more vivid. Those whose hearts had waxed gross might have been frightened into some ceremonial observance of religion or some spiritless form of godliness; but with all this, we have no reason to suppose any less resistance of the sensual mind to the moral purity of Christ.

Jesus might have conciliated vast numbers of the Jews of his time by laying before their eyes the foundation of a mighty carnal or political kingdom. These people could come eagerly to the baptism of John. They had no insurmountable objection to a ceremonial repentance. They failed to comprehend a spiritual kingdom of the Divine Redeemer. They did not wish to have their hearts changed. These descendants of Abraham were enraged on hearing Jesus rebuke their unholy lives, and their dependence for divine favor on the bare fact of their being the children of Abraham. For this reason there was to their minds a biting irony in the words of Jesus: "Ye must be born again."

These degenerate Jews are distinctly told that they have no place in the kingdom of the Son of God, the Messiah, except they be born, not of water alone — not baptismal regeneration — but also of the Holy Spirit. Nothing but a genuine repentance and a washing of spiritual regeneration would suffice. Their Pharisaic nonentities of religion

could not be the basis of Christ's kingdom. The mission of the Redeemer's kingdom was of grander scope than Pharaisaic eye could scan. The greater number of this people, whose hearts had waxed gross, scornfully repudiated the idea of conversion from Jewish prejudices to a Christlike spirit.

In the corrupt hearts of the generation of Jews who opposed Christ, devils had a striking opportunity for snatching away the seed of divine truth. There was the infernal advantage of these gross hearts' deep-rooted aversion to the moral quality of the fundamental principles of the New Testament. A natural cause of their rejecting Christ is traceable to their long-cherished prejudices against anything like the spirit of the new covenant. In their hearts that had waxed gross was the moral reason for their being rejected of Christ. They would not repent nor believe with their hearts unto righteousness.

The Scriptures teach that there is a dark, personal background of evil—a term in the series of phenomena of evil back of earth and humanity—which explains something of the evil of humanity, and explains the easier terms of salvation offered to men; easier than any of which we have any hint in the Scriptures as offered to superior intelligences who have sinned nearer the throne, in the midst of brighter manifestations of the divine government, and in the heavenly light without external solicitation to sin against God.

Why is it that highly cultivated minds reluctantly accept the theory that evil spirits have access to the minds of men on the earth? Is it not that Christian culture contracts the area of diabolical manifestation? Just as culture, with Christian virtue, tends to destroy such fields of demon manifestation as that in Judea in the time of Christ, so—without suspicion of casting dishonor on the veracity of the Gospel record—it gives less and less attention to the subject of "demoniacal possession," choosing rather, with the diction of culture, to speak of evil as it is manifested in the lives of wicked men whose hearts have evidently and responsibly "waxed gross."

The darkness of sin is not yet dissipated from the earth. The turbulence of rebellion against the government of God has not ceased. There is still gross wickedness, unaccountable if attributed to humanity alone. A multitude of human hearts that have waxed gross and greedily consent unto sin, consent as unto devils.

The human heart's resistance against the Son of God is a matter of practical observation, whatever forces of evil may accompany or are antecedent to this resistance. A clear consciousness of evil is a demonstration just as plain as a visible devil. If men will sincerely and valiantly give battle to all evil, it is a matter of comparatively little importance how much credit or discredit Satan may have.

III.

BEAUTY AND THE BEAST.

A MULTITUDE of men throughout Christendom utterly fail to recognize the divine beauty of Christian character. This is not to be viewed as a failure of Christ, as if there were no beauty of the Son of God that he should be admired of men. Why, then, is the glorious beauty of the Christ-character thus unrecognized and rejected?

There are those who do not lift the eyes of the soul above the horizon of Judea. They see Christ only in the dim religious sense exercised by a pagan just converted from the grossest of his superstitions. The Christ is viewed by thousands as a fossilized specimen of being, half-human, half-divine, or as a divine automaton moving in a distant age—a pantomimic rebuke of the present age, with its inability exactly to reproduce the surroundings of the cross on Calvary. Such minds imagine that they have attained to all the significance of the Christ-character, while such attainment is a divorce of their lives from the harmless spirit of their age, resulting in ugly distortions instead of the clear spiritual beauty of real Christian character.

Criticism in religion has some points of resemblance with criticism in art and literature. A man's

unfavorable judgment concerning the beauty of the Christ-character is not to be accepted independently of his moral taste. The moral taste may have been grossly neglected and vitiated. The Divine Spirit may have been carelessly slighted. The man who has persisted in disobeying his moral convictions and spiritual instincts has done violence to his moral and spiritual nature. His inattention to these convictions and instincts leads, at last, to lack of moral perception; and the very light of God's countenance, shining with promise of blessing to the soul, is rejected as offensive.

There is a process of vitiating the moral taste through infidelity to the ordinary principles of natural religion. The vitiated moral taste turns away from Christianity, not so much on account of lack of divine authority of the gospel—the question of authority may not have been examined at all—as on account of the soul's distaste of moral purity.

The principles of Christianity are to give character to men, along with the impressions made by the natural environment of human life on earth. There is nothing in the Scriptures to indicate that the individuality of every human being may not be as distinct as the individuality of Jesus.

If Jesus Christ, clothed with flesh and blood, were present to the vicious man of this generation, he would still make a disagreeable impression in this mind, and men might still be found with disposition to "crucify the Son of God afresh." So the Christ

stood before the carnal Jews of old, who despised and rejected the divine beauty and purity of his character.

The incarnation of divinity in the person of Jesus Christ needs not be repeated in every generation of men on earth. One such incarnation serves the complete religious purpose of God. This Christ is to be enshrined in the hearts of believing men. This crucified One ever liveth to make intercession for mankind. The one incarnation conformed to the religious condition and natural surroundings of the Hebrew people eighteen centuries ago. No conformity with the natural condition of the people of any land or any age will render Jesus Christ any more agreeable to the vicious heart so long as the vicious heart unyieldingly confronts the divinely holy life of Jesus. It is not a sufficient justification for one to declare that the holy principles of Christianity are unlovely and unattractive. Let one consult his perverted moral taste for the peculiar reason of his aversion to the beauty of holiness.

When Christ comes, responsive to the moral need of humanity, he often wooes in vain the free heart that viciously rejects spiritual beauty. In vain Christ attests his heavenly mission by heavenly works in the presence of the malicious spirit that persists in saying, "He hath a devil."

It is an ugly feature of moral depravity that man has often converted into a symbol of cruelty the very cross on which Heaven's holy sacrifice was

made. The teaching of Jesus—beautiful in holiness—has been perverted by vile men to serve the purpose of beastliness.

During several centuries of the history of the Church the greater part of the records of genuine Christian life was lost in the cloud of absorbing superstitions; thrown into the shadow of controversies about the non-essentials of religion; suppressed by the fury of persecution,—so that many Christians, in devout sympathy with the mind of Christ a thousand years ago, we may easily conceive, quietly and beautifully ripened for heaven while making no conspicuous figure in the history of their times. The pens of only a few divinely inspired men have preserved for us the record of the divine beauty of Christ. Many writers, busy with the history of useless wars, abominable superstitions, and degrading idolatries, left to Matthew, Mark, Luke, and John the sweet story of Jesus. Witness crafty Josephus, studious historian of the Jews, devoting but a brief paragraph to Christ—if indeed he penned that—at the very time that Christ was stirring the whole Jewish world, and while his Messianic demonstrations were fresh in the memory of living men!

Just as in the past, so in the present, there is a modesty of the Christian character which veils its beauty from the gaze of the vulgarly vicious. The least beautiful profession of Christian love is often most immodestly conspicuous. It is restrained by

no shyness of spiritual modesty. The sweetest voice of piety is too gentle, too refined, with too much of the music of heaven in it, for ears dulled to the "still small voice of God," or for souls that will not hear what the Divine Spirit saith.

We are sorry for one who sees no beauty whatever in the loveliest Christian character, while he looks for beauty in every direction except in a Christian life responsibly his own; while he fails to conceive of himself putting on beautiful garments of righteousness; while he does not yearn for something in the realm of spiritual possibilities inexpressibly more beautiful than a sinful life.

The crying want of the soul, blinded by persistent habits of vice, is conscious fitness for the heaven of Christ. This is a consciousness of character joined with the grace of Christ; this is character which looks with chaste hope toward the heaven which Christ proposes as the ultimate home of the redeemed soul; this is heaven, radiant with the glorious beauty of Christian holiness; this is a glorious spiritual beauty, seen by the eye of faith in the Son of God, who walked the earth in the beauty of heavenly sinlessness.

IV.

FIGHTING A FRIEND.

THERE is a zeal for God, in the name of Christianity, that too frequently breathes the spirit of misanthropy. This zeal too often regards the "unregenerate" as possessing no natural virtues whatever. It is an unfortunate mistake of piety when such virtues are not recognized in the natural man. Christian piety can afford to recognize in these natural virtues some trace of the influence of Christ. They may be regarded as open doors of the heart, for Christ to enter and take possession of the entire man.

The keen perception of the unregenerate man sometimes discovers that the narrowly regenerate hate the sinner rather than the sins. It is unfortunate that the sinner does not always detect the misanthrope in the guise of religion. It is sad that the sinner is so slow in recognizing, at the door ajar, the Divine Friend of sinners.

We hopefully look in the future for a better and better physical basis of spiritual or Christian life. We look for less bitter fancies of Christ, as in hostile opposition to the instincts of manhood. We expect science—especially social science—to become more and more the faithful ally of healthy Chris-

tianity. We expect the energy of the Spirit of Christ to flow harmoniously with the full free current of natural vitality in healthy Christians. We do not expect that the idiosyncrasies of distorted nervous systems will always be regarded, by any great number of people, as the fittest representation of the choicest piety.

Many a sick man sees clearly what his weary hands and feet and brain can not perform. He may be able to exhibit only the passive virtues of the Christian profession; but, in so doing, he completely triumphs over the morbid conditions to which many other men surrender. Still, we may say that there is in the world not a little of unhealthy Christianity. This unhealthy Christianity confronts while it does not relieve—but rather aggravates—the moral insanity of the vicious who persist in looking upon Christ as an aggressive enemy rather than a friend.

The man who all his life spurns the gospel as a rule of conduct of life has no just conception of Jesus as his best, Divine Friend. He sees no friendliness in strictures on the bad course of his life. He suspiciously regards the declaration that he shall stand before the judgment-seat of Christ as a vengeful threat of severe morality. He burns with indignation that a rule of holy conduct should be imposed on him. A conviction of vice takes possession of his mind that Christ is an oppressive Master. He does not cherish the pleasing idea of

salvation from sin. He nurses angry thoughts of the prohibition of vice; and these thoughts trouble his mind. He has no delightful anticipation of heaven; he has, instead, dark foreboding of unrest of soul. He will not realize that the powers of evil are leagued against him. He imagines that powers of heaven, led on by Christ, are leagued against him. Instead of condemning himself, for his own sin, he condemns his offered Savior, and sullenly bows his head to the fatality of sin, when he might hopefully lift his eyes toward glorious Christian destiny.

There is a fault in the Church which is repeatedly uncovered by revivals, but which is yet far from being corrected by the superficial, transient, vaporous religious sensations that characterize too many revivals. The fault is fortified in habits of thought that hold on to the extravagances of weak minds in the heat of sensational revival as of the very essence of religion. To obviate the fault involves one of the most perplexing problems that engage the attention of the evangelical Churches. The problem is: How shall we rise to a higher plane of Christian thought—retain pure and simple spiritual power—make smaller the mass of those who effectually resist the gospel of Christ, all at the same time? The solution of the problem has much to do with the class of people who get wrong ideas of the gospel's opposition to their lives through observing the incongruity between the

ordinary life of the Church and the extravagantly *sensational* life of the Church.

Genuine Christianity is the very embodiment of God's rich love toward the very men who fight the Savior as their enemy. There is nothing disagreeable in a soul's clear conception of the love of God as manifested through Christ. There is a character of Christian piety that gladly recognizes a sweet undertone of the voice of God's love in the very thunders of Sinai. There is a touching voice of divine love in the bitter cry of the self-sacrificing Son of God on Calvary. There is a moral grandeur in the freedom of a human soul, and there is a splendid pity and a tone of heavenly love in the invitation of Jesus calling that free, but sinful and wandering soul back to God.

Human life is not worth living on earth if there is no law emanating from the All-wise, pointing rational creatures to higher possibilities of life in the direction which immortal powers may safely take. Is there not some law of highest communion with God? Is there not some law that marks the way to the highest heavenly life?

The law side of our idea of God does not necessarily interfere with the love side. Law directs; love blesses. Sinai is wreathed with fire; Calvary is stained with blood. Sinai calls attention to divine authority; Calvary calls attention to divine compassion, and holy, divine love. The law is necessary; the active love that the Spirit of Christ

inspires is the fulfilling of the law. Lovelessness is lawlessness; it fights, it spurns Christ, who is the embodiment of divine love.

A multitude of people on the earth persist in regarding Christianity as an oppressive system of religion, opposed to all the sweetest instincts of their natural lives. They do not pause to consider that a redeemed soul's love of God in Christ is most wonderful emancipation from oppressive bondage to sin. They make no virile effort to gain genuine spiritual liberty. They do not cherish a pleasing thought that the religion of Jesus is divinely designed to set them free. How free indeed is he who is bound only with silken cords of love!

Jesus, the Son of God, is a strikingly natural expression of God's love toward mankind. He walks, talks, and dines with men. He talks sweetly and gently of the Father's house on high. He does not interfere in the least with the legitimate, harmless daily business of men. He illustrates and sanctifies the common friendship of men.

Jesus had indeed a special and exalted mission on earth which no ordinary human being could perform. He is King of kings, and Lord of lords; but that is not permitted to obscure his sympathies with ordinary human life. He notices the beautiful flowers in his path. He loves little children; he takes them in his arms and blesses them. He is moved with compassion at the sight of a multitude faint and hungry. He is filled with a most natural

but righteous indignation at the hypocrisy of the Pharisees. His presence at a wedding sanctifies the family, and implies a benediction on the brightest temporal hopes of youth.

The life of Christ with men is a divinely human expression of God's sympathy with humanity. It is to familiarize our souls with the idea of God, and to encourage our approach to him as the Divine Friend of mankind.

It is most strikingly emphasized in the gospel that Jesus Christ is the Friend of sinners. He is "a Friend that sticketh closer than a brother." They who resist Christ as they resist a foe, have a misconception of the friendship of God in Christ. It may have appeared to their minds only as a figure of speech. It may have been associated with the cant of men who have never made an idea of religion clearly intelligible nor agreeable to their "fellow-sinners." The divine friendliness that breathes in freshness and purity in the New Testament has a right to manly recognition.

Think of Jesus as locking arms with one, walking with him along some pleasant, familiar path, as he walked with the early disciples, in the midst of precious home-scenes, talking with familiar, friendly tone on such a theme as this: "Blessed are they which do hunger and thirst after righteousness, for they shall be satisfied. Blessed are the merciful, for they shall obtain mercy. Blessed are the pure in heart, *for they shall see God!*" Such is the

gentle friendliness of Him who teaches with divine authority. Happy the man who cherishes sympathies with this Son of God; who casts aside the weapons of his carnal fight; who takes the proffered friendly, Divine Hand, and realizes an inspiration of life which makes him, a sinful creature, more godlike, while, at the same time, not less manly!

V.

SINFUL PLEASURES.

THE pleasures of human life on earth, in relation to the life-claims of the Christian religion, present the following three peculiarly noticeable phases:

1. *Innocent pleasures.* God is good to give us life which spontaneously yields sweet, pure enjoyment. There are pleasures of human life which the most scrupulous conscience can not look upon as transgressions of moral law. They are not dragged into theological discussions; they can not soil the soul. They whisper sometimes to the soul of the worst man that lives, like zephyrs from Eden. They force no blush to the cheek of innocence; they send no tingling pain along the nerves; they make no sighs nor tears.

The class of persons who resist the religion of Christ have no complaint against the Divine Lawgiver with reference to any experiences of these innocent pleasures. Their resistance to the Christ is not so innocent.

2. *Questionable pleasures.* Christ gives his followers occasion to think in the midst of enjoyment of life. There are honest differences of opinion among real Christians concerning amusements.

One Christian's innocent tastes may be utterly unlike the innocent tastes of another equally conscientious Christian. There may be various shades of opinion concerning the moral quality of amusement *as* amusement. Various associated ideas will influence our opinions, more or less, concerning this or that mode of pleasure. Some will be calmly thoughtful over questions of lawful pleasure; some will fret; some will mourn; some will be censorious; some will be charitable; some will be neutral.

It is not this phase of questionable amusements that troubles the class of people who resist the religion of Christ. In their case there is no such painstaking of conscience. They are not anxiously debating on the debatable ground of worldly amusements; they are fighting the divine authority which invades the territory of pleasures unquestionably hostile to the divine government, and inimical to the peaceful interests of mankind.

3. *Positively evil pleasures.* There are evils which yield pleasurable sensations, and are at the same time hurtful to mankind, and always contrary to the law of God. Pleasurable sensations without a firm basis of moral principle are deceptive. The nerves may be made to lie to the soul. A class of people find enjoyment in excesses of what they are pleased to call "liberty"—it is, in plain truth, licentiousness. The senses are intoxicated with that which defiles the soul, and life is an effervescence of low animal spirits.

A nation whose pleasures are vitiating the blood, and whose children grow only to become frivolous men and women, can not hope to live forever among the nations of the earth. If such a nation shall not have a regeneration, it must die. This whole world of mankind can not forever survive a general abandon to pleasure, reckless of all law of God. Universal vice in the course of a few generations would sweep the race of men from the face of the earth as by the waters of a deluge.

The pain and grief of the Holy Son of God on Calvary are a terrible rebuke to the reckless pleasures of sin. The world needs this spectacle of submissive, sacrificial suffering on the cross. It is suffering vindicating divine law. It is Heaven's awful rebuke to earthly pleasure defying divine law. We can not fathom all the mystery of that suffering on the Calvary cross; we do not understand all the rationale of its virtue. Doubtless that tragedy on the cross was designed for other than human eyes; for higher and deeper and broader than human thought in its present state; for history reaching farther than human history in time; for emotions deeper than can be stirred in the heart of humanity while dwelling on earth.

The death of the Son of God as viewed by wondering angels must have been in vivid contrast with human *life* on earth. The emotions of the soul of Him who was wounded for man's transgressions must have been in startling contrast with the

false pleasure that attends, for a season, man's transgression of divine law. We sometimes contrast the sufferings of vice with the pleasures of virtue. Here on the Calvary cross is one of Heaven's amazing disclosures: for some divine purpose, which sinful men are invited to investigate, virtue suffers while men pursue pleasure in the path of vice!

Sinai and Calvary respectively blaze and bleed in the path of pleasure-seeking men, reckless alike of divine law and divine grace. Sinai voices the divine law that forbids sinful pleasures; the tragedy on Calvary, the suffering of Divine Love, rebukes the pleasures that defy divine law.

The principles of morality authorized by Christ rebuke the fictitious contentment of the lovers of sinful pleasures. They would, if they could, thus ignobly love and live forever on the lowlands of life. They are in condition to starve on angels' food. They foolishly ask only to be let alone. The crucified Christ disturbs their peace. They are disturbed through death impending. They are made uneasy through unbidden convictions at their sensual feasts. But apart from the disturbing influences of the persistent presence of the Christian religion on earth, there is a contentment which vicious pleasure gives the soul it dwarfs.

The Lord Christ vainly knocks at the closed door of many a preoccupied heart. Sad indeed that in the

name of pleasure, there should be written over that door: "Admittance here to everything pleasant, with the single exception of whatever is divine!"

In the view of a man whose life is contracted by the transient pleasures of sin, whose moral taste is vitiated, whose will-force is impaired by enervating vice, earth appears more immediately available than heaven. God's plan appears less practicable than man's plan for pleasure. The man seizes his first—that is, his temporal—opportunity for pleasure, regardless of any divine purpose concerning his eternal life. Every plan of reckless pleasure is naturally a godless plan. God can not be retained in plans of pleasure which ignore the immortality and moral capacity of the human soul.

The Lord Jesus Christ places heaven—and eternal life in heaven—in the foreground of the picture of pure happiness for man. This is exactly the reverse of what many men imagine concerning happiness. The perspective of the irreligious man's picture of happiness is wrong. There is the taint of sin in his imagination; there is too little religious color; there is too slight appreciation of distances in his view. He fails to place first in his view the kingdom of God. Scenes of unrighteousness arise and obstruct the beatific vision which the Word of God would open for the eye of the soul. Men are condemned for their refusal to turn away from their filthy imagery of what is most desirable in the tem-

poral life, while closing their eyes against the heavenly view that extends into the ages of God beyond the limits of time.

There is an instinct of the human soul, surviving its absorption in sinful pleasures, which at times vividly apprehends the perspective of Christ's delineation of happiness for man. It is, at the same time, an instinct of resistance to the *glad tidings from afar*, concerning life infinitely better than the life of the soul that seeks brief pleasure in sin; but this resistance is peculiarily significant.

There is a divine philosophy of happiness. Christ's glad tidings from heaven is a revelation of eternal truth. Eternal life necessarily stands in the foreground of the divine message of Christ. The Christ-truth is eternal; it necessarily contradicts the imperfections of humanity in time. The fact that a human soul sins with emotions or sensations of pleasure in sin, does not change the truth that proceeds of necessity from God. The heavenly hope of those who give to the Lord Christ the obedience of faith, ought not to perish in order to give the appearance of coherency to the delirium of manifestly sinful pleasure.

VI.

COMPROMISE OR NOTHING.

WHENEVER the gospel prescribes good character, an issue is made with bad character. At such issue the gospel can make no compromise. The gospel can not consistently compromise its own character of holiness. It can not void its own divine purpose of holiness. The standard of the gospel can not be lowered to satisfy the human spirit that is utterly careless of religion. God condescends, it is true, to the moral need of the fallen human spirit; but it is that the human spirit, soiled by sin, may find satisfaction in being lifted up—not in lowering the gospel standard. "Blessed are they which do hunger and thirst after righteousness; for they shall be satisfied."

Strike out of the minds of all who reject the principles of Christian holiness, all belief in future punishment of sin; and we do not conceive of these persons on that account any more enthusiastically accepting the right spirit of the gospel in the formation of good character. We see that men persist in sinfulness, and remain unchristian in spite of either fear or honor.

The gospel of Christ must be uncompromising in the measure of its requirement concerning spirit-

ual life, or it can not be regarded as divine. It can not consistently require of the life that has gone radically wrong, less than that which is suggested by the confession and supplication of the penitent king of Israel: "I acknowledge my transgressions; create in me a clean heart, O God, and renew a right spirit within me!" That is not a supplication for compromise on the part of the penitent. It is the expression of spiritual yearning, and of humble surrender to the grace of God.

If the spirit of holiness unto the Lord could be adjusted to coincide with the animus of worldly evil, a divine revelation demanding a few mechanical ceremonies to be observed as nominal service to the Lord would be accepted by many as a promise of the next best thing after the essentially irreligious enjoyment of this earthly life. Even in the Churches there are some who, during the week, absorbed in secular business, fail to exhibit the heavenly spirit of their religion, but on the Sabbath pay their nominal tribute of service to the Lord, go through their drill as Sunday soldiers of the cross, and nod their sleepy approbation of sound doctrine. These seek to compromise the religion which others directly resist.

Let us look a little into the oft-repeated and much-abused phrase, "serving the Lord." "Divine services" in the sanctuary are the ritual of the redeemed spirit. "Servant of God" is a figure of speech indicative of a devout spirit of obedience to

God's law; hence, in this view, he who serves the divine cause and purpose of righteousness on earth is a servant of God. To serve God with forms only, while serving the adversary of God with the spirit, is an insult to the inspiring Spirit of the Bible.

A mind not in sympathy with the essentially holy purpose of Christianity may recognize the uncompromising spirit and purpose of the religion in the direction of moral regeneration and holiness, and at the same time deliberately and strenuously resist; but such resistance, with such recognition, is too gross to be regarded as commendable natural honesty.

Condense the volumes that theologians have written; throw out the controversy that has grown from little germs of difference in men's habits of religious thinking; detect a common hunger of soul within the circle of conflict of opinions. In all this get at the kernel of conditions of salvation that God proposes—conditions answering to the divine insight into the moral want of a free sinful soul.

Listen to the Savior saying, without definitions to confuse the soul at the crisis of its life, "Repent." Behold the Son of God, who lived to teach and died to redeem man, offered as the divine object of saving faith. "Repentance toward God and faith in the Lord Jesus Christ," is the condensed expression of the conditions of entrance into the spiritual kingdom of God, which reaches from

earth where sinful souls are redeemed, into the heavens where redeemed souls are glorified.

Millions are hovering on the outside of the spiritual area of this glorious kingdom of God. They are starving for the righteousness of God. They shrink from the faintest shadow of conditions of entrance into God's kingdom of grace. They imagine that there is something more hopeful in drifting on the wide sea of unbelief than in committing their souls to the current of divinely gracious conditions of salvation that flows definitely heavenward.

There is a divine kingdom of righteousness very near humanity on earth, if the heart of humanity would recognize the divine presence. It is the kingdom of the Lord and Savior, Jesus Christ, heralded by the prophet John, as "at hand." The voice of the Redeemer takes up and prolongs the voice of the herald; but it is not a voice compromising the righteous conditions of entrance into the kingdom. Christ, the King in his kingdom, says, "Repent." The scepter in his royal hand is a scepter of righteousness. The heart that truly bows to this token of divine royalty makes a repentant pledge of loyalty to righteousness—not a compromise by which he may stand outside of the sway of the kingly Savior, and yet reap the benefit of a scheme of salvation. If thousands *will* stand outside, then they *must*.

A genuine Christian life corresponds, in some

appreciable degree, with a soul's insight into the moral significance of the life and death of Christ. A sublime faith in the Divine Savior does not arise from a shallow repentance. Faith that deserves the name springs from repentance that deserves the name. A steadfast Christian life can not be the legitimate result of an unsteady purpose. There can be no hearty espousal of the Christian cause of holiness without a sincere renunciation of sin.

"Without faith it is impossible to please God." The very moment a truly repentant soul seizes this principle of pleasing relation with God in Christ, he has thoughts of mercy and pardon. Christ in that moment is impressed in the soul. A process of unfolding of one's spiritual nature begins. The sunshine of heaven acts upon the faith-germ; it blooms; it bears fruit. Now, a multitude of people recognize clearly enough this faith as the basis of a Christian life which they will by no means endure. The Christian character—by whatever process attained—is spurned. This fact, manifest in a multitude of lives, instead of reproaching, vindicates the gospel of Christ.

There is that in the real reformation of an unchristian life which evinces the uncompromising spirit of the gospel, that is at the same time the peculiar glory of the Christian religion. There are those whose ideas of respectability are incompatible with the humiliation implied in genuine repentance; and their ideas of the possibilities of divine

grace in the soul contradict the spiritual exaltation implied in faith toward the Lord Jesus Christ. If they could substitute something of the spirit of the unbelieving world for the spirit of moral renovation or regeneration that breathes in the gospel, they might accept the form of the religion of Christ. They might be persuaded to join the visible Church while refusing to pass the threshold of the spiritual temple, saying in effect: "Beyond this line of compromise we yield nothing to the claim of Christ upon our lives."

VII.

THE ENFEEBLED CONSCIENCE.

THERE are those in whose souls a process of enfeebling conscience has gone farther in the fact of their rejecting Christ than any morally careful and reasonable examination that they have ever made of Christ's claim of divine authority.

Comparatively few of the mass of people who are pleased to call themselves skeptics are making any thorough investigation, "scientific" or otherwise, of the evidences of the Christian religion. If the conscience of such were revivified, they would require no clearer evidence of the divine origin of the Christian religion than that already within their reach, in order to accept religion.

It is not the imperturbability of a solidly based skepticism that explains the dead calm in many minds in the congregation under the appeals of the evangelical preacher. It is rather the stagnation of the moral sense. This is the ordinary skepticism which begins with the declension of the regard due the moral sense—the conscience—in its testimony as to the common moral law, and advances to its position of vicious disregard of Christianity with the semblance of strong reason for unbelief.

When, through a process of enfeebling con-

science, one is emboldened to reject the Christian religion, shall such boldness be exultingly attributed to the strengthening of the faculties of the mind? A reckless violation of the moral sense is more shameful than tampering with the non-moral faculties of the mind. We hold that the Bible is the best text-book to be used in the course of man's moral education, and that the judgment passed on the ethics of Christianity by men of moral sensibilities blunted by habits of vice is a shamefully defective judgment.

No strength of intellectual faculties can atone for the enfeebling of conscience. No inspiration of genius can make reparation for the injury done to the moral nature of the soul by the shameless silencing of the inspiration of conscience. If genius fail to cherish conscience, it is godless. The literature that is unconscientious, and essentially soulless, and designedly Christless, will not ultimately satisfy the moral hunger and thirst, the religious yearning of the souls of men. Platitudes of Christian philanthropy can not fill the place of the divine philanthropy of the Son of God in the bleeding heart of humanity. Morsels of dainty literary sentiment with the flavor of Christless genius will not satisfy the consciously sinful soul hungering for righteousness. We have faith both in God and humanity sufficient to believe that man will ultimately protest against the literature which ignores the deep moral want of humanity, and which assigns conscience

an unimportant place in the aspiring, struggling soul of our race.

The abused moral nature of man avenges itself in the case of persistent criminals more frequently by a final silence which is painless, than by remorse of conscience that rends the soul. This silence, as of death, is more terribly significant than the cry of remorse.

There is a thinly disguised heartlessness of manners in some sections of fashionable society which is only another name for irreligiousness. The frequent violation of social obligations finally sullies the social conscience. Conscienceless friendship is a sentiment rising but slightly above the significance or the aim of the meanest self-interest. Sins against fashionable propriety excite a deeper horror than sins against God which a false code of modern fashion excuses.

There is a manifest ungodliness in the imperiousness of fashion. Why should conscience bow down to it, succumb to it, and lose its life in such idolatry and such surrender? There is nothing indecorous in Christian conscientiousness that it should be banished from polite society. If the slaves of fashionable propriety were not so reckless of the proprieties of conscience, a gentle Christian spirit—a new social atmosphere—might become the fashion in society.

There is a domain of conscience in religion, just as there is a domain of *taste* in fine art and litera-

ture. In this view, the Christ of the Gospel is as little comprehended by the man who has wrecked his conscience as the finest work of art or the finest work of literary genius is comprehended by the man who may be said to have no taste. There are men of highly cultivated taste in whom conscience is enfeebled by neglect or abuse; nevertheless such persons are apt to be proud of something which they imagine to be moral strength. The mistake is made in the weakness of *moral taste.*

Here is a man, for instance, whose taste has been formed on classic models; and the religious sentiments of the gospel of Christ are entirely too tame for him. His classic models have set conscience far in the background. The gentleness, the self-renunciation, the real humanity of Christian charity—all appear to him a degradation of taste. If conscience be weak and taste highly cultivated, that proud taste will be obtrusive, and will be first to examine and decide upon the peculiar claims of Christian character. The result is not very uncertain; an indelicate conscience is no match for pride of taste.

This pride of taste passes judgment on conscience in others, and calls it cowardice. No duelist, infatuated by a false code of honor, ever laid down his life with a sadder devotion than the man of taste divorced from conscience, who sacrifices his spiritual life on the altar of taste that he may avoid the imputation of pusillanimity of conscience. This man

makes an unnecessary sacrifice. A conscience enlightened by the spirit of Christ does not interfere with the most exquisite taste.

Why should not the man of cultivated taste in art and literature have the enlightened moral taste to find pleasure in seeing men of little mental culture and little taste made better through the inspiration of conscience in which Christ the Savior is recognized? There is nothing in such a view of evangelical religion as a cultivated mind is capable of taking to justify the aversion which proceeds from pride of taste that is ashamed of the voice of conscience. Nor does mental culture find justification for regarding moral beauty of Christian character only as it regards beauty in fine art.

A pride of imaginary moral strength, instead of consciousness of weakness, is observable in a variety of instances. There are offensively coarse men as ridiculously proud as men of taste. There are poor men as punctiliously proud as rich men. There are ignoramuses as obstinately proud of their opinions as very learned men. Given, a man without Christian virtue, without learning, without taste; let his conscience become enfeebled to the extent that he rarely, if ever, feels the slightest compunction,—show him a weeping, praying penitent, and he will glory in something he calls strength in himself, that refuses to be humbled before the majesty of divine law. He will regard that penitent's conscientiousness as a pitiable, contemptible

thing. In his view, a Christian is essentially a coward; a conscience is a something which gives false alarm of moral danger; the gospel of Christ a story for weak men, and women and children, which a man of mettle and muscle, like himself, may dismiss with contempt.

The man of conscience enfeebled and polluted through vile abuse, is prone to glory in the shame of quenching the influences of the Holy Spirit in his soul. He is proud of the soiled human spirit that dares to insult the Divine Spirit. He is pleased to mar his spirit's susceptibility to the gracious impressions of the Spirit of God. The grunt of brutal satisfaction betrays the closing of his moral nature against the impressions of the Divine Nature. A self-glorification of the human spirit, mounted on the ruins of conscience, is thus frequently exhibited.

An unholy sense of triumph, rather than compunction, follows the collapse of the moral sense, and with it an unseemly gloating in the prospect of Atheism. A man who, in the interest of a grossly sinful life, has parted with the testimony of conscience, is a man practically without a God. In his narrow view, his own arm will get all his victories. With no impressions of Supreme Divinity in his sullied conscience, he will, in a characteristic manner, deify himself. Self-deification is the fatal vice and weakness of Atheism. When no breath of heaven, revealing glimpses of divine glory, is wafted

to the soul, a man will seek some other glory. If in no other way, he will glory in the shame of irreligion; he will decorate the wreck of conscience with a ghastly smile of triumph; he will be pleased to exclaim, "See what *I* have done!" even though the vaunted achievement be the ruin of his moral nature.

There are people in Christian lands who have no practical belief in the cardinal virtues which distinguish Christianity from paganism. There is, at the basis of the irreligiousness of Christendom, that which, more than anything else, accounts for it: it is the sin of man against his moral nature—the depression of the moral sense below the plane of practical belief in the virtues which adorn the genuinely Christian profession.

The skepticism of the enfeebled conscience spurns the divine message from heaven in the measure of the vicious silencing of the Divine Voice in the human soul.

VIII.

WORLDLY-MINDEDNESS.

THE gospel of the Lord Jesus Christ, a heavenly message to this lower world, perpetually encounters, through the successive generations of mankind, the resistance of a worldly-mindedness that effectually prevents the impression of the heavenly character of Christ in the human soul. This is another phase of the phenomenon of heavenly seed of truth falling in earthly soil.

Let it be fairly considered that the Christian religion, with many striking marks of divine truthfulness, steadily holds out the prospect of life for man beyond his present earthly environment. Let it be duly considered that the life proposed for our contemplation is everlasting, and befitting the glorious heaven of the Son of God. Then, it is not at all unreasonable to regard the heavenly life-view which the gospel unfolds as modifying the earth-view of an immortal temporarily residing on earth.

The worldly-minded man receives gross impressions of the material world, instead of impressing the world with the marks of a spiritual nature. If holy angels from heaven were to dwell on earth for an age, and then depart, would they not leave

vestiges of heavenly ideas? What but the fact that this world gets improper mastery, prevents man from impressing the earth with clearer signs of religious ideas worthy the extreme probability of his immortality? Which is the superior, earth or the human soul? Which ought to rise above the other? Christian philosophy answers the question in a manner which may satisfy the proudest philosophic spirit, while it humbles only in that measure which makes humility beautiful. The humility which Christ inculcates is nothing less in its spirit and propriety than the divinely prescribed condition of heavenly exaltation. It gives the soul a vast advantage—a mastery of the world.

The Lord Jesus Christ is fairly and conspicuously set forth as the Sun of righteousness in the moral firmament. Spirit-immortality is bathed in the light of this Sun, and derives hence its most glorious character of attractiveness for the desire of our spirits. Millions who sat in moral darkness in the region of death have recognized a heavenly spiritual light, and their fainting spirits have been invigorated and lifted up by the eternal truth, the divine grace, the glorious righteousness disclosed. Millions with full, glad hearts have thanked and praised the Creator for the Christ.

This Sun shines clearly and gloriously in the moral sky. It is spanning the day of salvation for sinful man in time. Innumerable vain ideas of recovery from the wretchedness of sinfulness have

trooped through the soul of humanity along the ages. Mighty worldly kingdoms have risen and fallen. Vast experiments of a simply worldly civilization have been tried, and have signally failed. The cries of sorrow and the voices of vile passions have been heard, with endless changes. Schemes of temporal and temporizing worldly philosophy have struggled in vain for the suffrage of humanity. Through all the mutations of worldly ideas, kingdoms, civilizations, passions, philosophies, the Sun of righteousness, like the blazing eye of God, has looked steadily upon the earth during the centuries of the history of the Christian religion.

Millions of torches have been lighted at the inextinguishable flame of this Sun of righteousness. Yet there are dark shadows everywhere on the soul of humanity. What are these shadows? Why does not this Sun flood every soul with light? Why does not every human countenance reflect a heavenly radiance—the solar radiance of righteousness? The answer is, that in so far as the religious character of many is concerned, there is an eclipse of the glorious Sun of righteousness. The soul is groveling in the deep shadow of the lower world, and purely Christian ideas of immortality and heaven are obscured.

A human soul is a world. The provinces of a man's possible thought are vaster than those of the mightiest empire of earth. The simplest volition of a man's free will at this moment is in wonderful

contrast with the mass of motion of the machinery of the material universe. Suns are man's toys if he would but truly be God's child in the spirit and exercise of his mind. He is greater than the starry firmament if he would but be humbled in the presence of God. His simplest emotion of gratitude to his Creator is a signal of intelligent life such as suns and stars have never given. Surely this earth should be at the feet of this child of God, this heir of heaven; and earth's sounds should sometimes be hushed, its objects invisible, its delusions unveiled, while he reverently listens to the voice of the Son of God. In the suffering of the Son of God on Calvary is provided a shrine for the religious emotions of the man who is weary of laying all his offerings in the lap of earth. The gospel provides for the man who to thanksgiving for the ministry of earth will add praise to God for the contribution of the Christ to his redemption from sin and from a blind and soulless devotion to the world given him for purposes nobler than those suggested by irreligion.

"What is a man profited if he should gain the whole world? or what shall a man give in exchange for his soul," or his spiritual life? In the midst of engrossing secular business, a busy man of the world is asked a heavenly question. In the midst of a palpable life, with its tangible, estimable possessions and relations, is thrust a question concerning the voiceless, at present almost inestimable life of the soul.

Suppose this lower world gained—its treasures, its pleasures, its honors; suppose nothing higher than the earthly life included in this gain; suppose nothing in sympathy with Christ is added to life in the course of a soul's utmost worldly advancement,—what, then, is gained? The answer is, in a word, the *world;* but what is the profit, after all, of such gain of the world at the expense of spiritual life? Thus, if we suppose the lower world gained, we must suppose the higher spiritual life lost—such is the idea of profit and loss suggested by the Son of God, who was manifested from heaven to save men, if they will be saved, from such bad bargaining.

It is not to be supposed that the man who has the mind of Jesus, walks the earth—as Jesus walked along the banks of Jordan and on the hills of Palestine—without an exquisite world-sense of Him who does, "in very deed, dwell with men on the earth." If the mind of a believer in the gospel is in genuine sympathy with the mind of Christ, a religious sentiment equivalent to that which prompted the Savior's indignant "Get thee behind me, Satan," will not appear unworthy his pure hope of a higher world, while he spurns the base suggestions of ambition, of avarice, and of the pleasures which debase manhood. The higher, finer, heavenly life is not to be bartered for the gross gains of this present world. No number of examples of mere

worldly success can justify this soulless trading of life.

In the view of the gospel of Christ there are what may be termed the *earth-side* and the *heaven-side* of the human mind. In this view we find an explanation of the phenomenon of an acute and vigorous intellect utterly missing the vital significance of the Inspired Writings. This intellect simply lacks its heaven-side. It is an intellect deficient, in that it is out of sympathy with the mind of Christ. It does not contain the Christian sentiment of religion; hence it ignores the Christ. The gospel is jargon to such an intellect, while it vigorously devotes itself to the task of harmonizing earthly things—even the most discordant—without attending to their spiritual significance. Such an intellect will construct genuine scientific theories from germs of material facts; will solve social problems by means of slight though truly apprehended social phenomena; will discover avenues of profitable trade invisible to the ordinary observer. Yet such an intellect fails to discover in the gospel of Christ the germinal principles of a most exalted life; stumbles over the theory of a heavenly life; overlooks the germs of eternal truth in the gospel relating to eternal life.

The heavenly seed of religious truth falls in the earthly soil of this intellect, and lies motionless. This intellect is building character on its earth-side

exclusively. Now, let it be understood that the Son of God does not rebuke the manhood nor lay an interdict on the intellect of the man who is building character on the heaven-side of his nature, and who, in the right spirit and aim of the gospel of Christ, manifests to the world that he is not predominantly worldly-minded.

IX.

THE CANT OF IRRELIGION.

THERE is a resistance to Christ which wears a mask, and is not distinctly outspoken. There are phrases which signify nothing of serious, original reasoning, employed by persons who reject the gospel of Christ, just as there are phrases which signify nothing of enlightened piety, employed by hypocrites and mistaken zealots.

Let us examine some of the hackneyed phrases which are regarded by many as expressive of sufficient reasons for rejecting the gospel of the Lord Jesus Christ:

1. *Natural religion.* All of religion that a man gets from nature and the natural evolutions of his consciousness is found also in the Bible. The writers of the Bible profaned none of the principles of natural religion when, by Divine inspiration, they recorded the peculiar doctrines of Christianity. The revelation of the Bible encircles every natural virtue with a clearer, holier light, and bathes these virtues in the warmth of a supernatural love. The Bible reveals divine grace for the man who, with all his natural virtues, is a sinner; places within the sinner's reach divine grace, for which every lingering natural virtue cries.

If natural religion were sufficient for a temporal life, it would not be all that we need for a life eternal. Many temporal virtues are merely artificial and superficial. Many social virtues serve only for transient phases of earthly society. Many natural virtues, divested of their external appearance, are seen to be simply selfish, and not adapted for the higher range of heavenly society.

The notion of religion which effects the least disturbance of the self-complacency of a soul of easy-going moral character is the notion of religion which some are pleased to call "natural," as distinguished from revealed religion, with the seal of the supernatural. The man who draws sharp lines between the theology of nature and the theology of the Bible, and settles down exclusively on the land-side of religion, is a pitiable example of "squatter sovereignty." The repudiation of the religion of Christ involves the repudiation of almost everything that deserves to be called religion. All the cant of religion that creeps into the sanctuaries of Christ is no worse than the cant of that profession of philosophy which ridicules the revealed religion, and professes simultaneously to be religious and unchristian.

2. *Universal* or *unconditional salvation.* The dogma of unconditional salvation is no less crude than what some are pleased to term a ridiculous fear of future consequences of sin. Blasphemous presumption is no less objectionable than abject fear.

It is admitted that there are childish fears of

danger which prevent the development of manly Christian character; but there is also an ignoring of moral danger to the extent that a soul looks upon all moral character with utter indifference. Take, for example, the man who has no fear of God before his eyes, whose only conception of the love or the mercy of God is of love or mercy as a shield for his sinning; such a one makes his very wreck of moral character his armor for recklessness of consequences. He who inverts salvation in order of time, placing it in the distance beyond this life regardless of the moral character of this life, rather than in the present as a season of moral probation, is surely indifferent to that type of character which engaged the heavenly earnestness of Christ and his apostles. We protest, in this instance, simply against the idea of ultimate salvation in which many minds rest, while careless of the *present* beauty and glory of well-proportioned Christian character.

3. "*Fuss about religion.*" There are those who assume the possession of lofty ideas of religion, and who, while leading lives of easy frivolity or vicious indulgence, indicate by certain phrases their sensitiveness (it is to be assumed) with respect to the exercises that degrade religion. They are fond of talking of "fuss about religion." It is the cant of high-level heads, while "commonplace" hearts are struggling to take practical hold of religion. They regard the warm, moving sentiments of Christianity in earnest as disturbing elements in society. The

silly, extravagant sentimentalism of love, the boisterous sentimentalism of politics, will frequently pass current with such, while every sentiment above the earth-level of their religious ideas is called "fuss." The doctrines of religion calmly uttered by Jesus Christ have often, indeed, been degraded and perverted from their high and holy significance to coincide with the meanest and narrowest taste and prejudice of men. There are persons whose elevation in the scale of intelligence, by all the Christian ideas that they are able and willing to grasp, is scarcely perceptible. What such persons say and do may be regarded as curiosities of human nature, but will not serve to exemplify much more than the rude beginning of religious aspirations. Angels fully equipped for the lofty life of heaven are not born of a single, crude, penitential throe. Christ's doctrines of religious life are designed for the moral part of our education; and when no more than one person of thousands is found willing to study natural science, it is not strange that the science of spiritual life is neglected.

The genuine emotions of intelligent and active Christians have often been most grossly misrepresented. The clangor of iron creeds, the dull tones of morbid sympathies, the noise of the nervous excitement of masses of men, the mawkish sentimentalism of minds confined to a single train of religious ideas, the superstitious dread, even, of the allurements of unsullied nature,—all have been mistaken

for the real emotions of the thoughtful Christian. On the contrary, the emotions of the Christian who has fair insight into the nature of his religion are chaste and modest. They rise to the solemn grandeur of the skies; they are in sympathy with the matchless manhood of Jesus; they are the true responses of the human soul to the unveilings of the divinity of Christ the Savior; they are the deep, voiceless responses to the invisible presence of the Holy Spirit. These emotions are not inconsistent with a noble dignity, a refined cheerfulness, a profound humility, and a magnanimous liberality of thinking; and all with the glow and glory of a magnificent hope of life eternal.

4. "*Time enough yet.*" Attention is called to a class of people who believe the gospel in a feeble way, because not to believe would involve some extra effort of thinking. At the same time, these fail to make personal, practical use of the gospel because that would involve some decision of character. Christ does not appear to them as immediately claiming the earnest attention of their souls, but as waiting their unoccupied time and convenience. They are too busy to be deeply anxious about moral character in time. The convenient season for "salvation" is supposed to be in the rapids, when the stream of time is plunging with them into eternity. They go on believing, to the day of their death, that they have "time enough" to go through a certain mechanical process of "getting religion"—

some sort of a substitute for hunger and thirst after righteousnesss. In their limited view, the terms of "salvation" are all merely technical and indicative of superficial ideas of religious life. A transient, shallow alarm is "repentance." When the alarm evaporates, "conversion" is supposed to follow. An easy presumption is the "faith" of "justification." A tingling of the nerves, a hallucination, is a "revelation." "Heaven is a high level of joy and safety for all that shall be technically saved in the sufficient time for such salvation just before the breath leaves the body. It is spiritual indolence, an indifference to development of sturdy moral character, a disposition to drift aimlessly through this life, that culminates in such phrases as "time enough yet."

There is always a loud call for the religious revival—the quickened enthusiasm of the Church of Christ—the emphatic, startling call to repentance. And there is the call, not less urgent, though often less noisy, for something between the seasons of revival—both before and after the special, passing "evangelist"—and there is rarely, if ever, more than "time enough" between for all that needs religiously, thoughtfully, and patiently to be done.

5. *Morality.* There is a grade of morality which confessedly serves only temporal purposes. This temporal morality has an air of pretentious virtue. It is Christian morality only in a limited sense—so far as this world goes. It is friendly to the interests

of the temporal state of society. It has a certain value in opposition to social evils; but it sinks far below the tone of Christ's sublime utterances as to the ultimate relations of God and man.

This temporal morality does not know the deep spiritual changes that a soul may undergo in intimate faith-relation with the Divine Savior. It has no wide-open eye for the prospect of immortality. In large measure it ignores the principles that are to regulate the life of men in eternity beyond time. No such discredit is here cast upon temporal morality as upon an utterly worthless thing; but it is charged with spiritual deficiency; it is not Christ-like in its theory of religious life.

The message of Christ is divinely more than a manual of temporal morality. While all that is beneficial to temporal society is involved in the morality of the gospel, it does not rest on so low a plane. The application of the moral principles of the gospel in the ever-changing affairs of human life on earth is incidental to the infinitely grander aim of those principles transcending all the possibilities of human life on earth.

While the Son of God speaks with greater than the tongue of man or of angels; inculcates eternal morality; tragically exemplifies by his death the divine principle of fallen man's redemption from the guilt, the bondage, and the sorrow of his fatal habit of sin; and points with his bleeding hands to heaven, all ablaze with the holy glory of God,—

shall one who fails to accept the divine message in the depths of his soul, rest in those superficial virtues of temporal utility which are only incidental to the progress of the Christian toward the higher, the highest life?

Sometimes a mere fragment of Christ's own system of morality—a virtue which, by itself, will not bear a severe test—is made to oppose the distinguishing spirit and complete aim of Christ. In this manner Christ is really resisted through a gross lack of symmetry of character. We do not refer in this instance to imperfect men of genuine Christian spirit, but to imperfect men both in fact and in spirit, who, possessing a solitary Christian virtue through force of circumstances, as a matter of temporal convenience, regard it as a badge of perfection, while they leave the spiritual domain of the Divine Savior unexplored. The objection to this one dominant virtue is, that it is made as serviceable as a vice in resisting the broad aim of Christ, and in rejecting the complete Christian character.

X.

THE METHOD OF SKULKING.

THERE are "highways and hedges" on earth where men are skulking and running away from Christ, who is divinely calling them heavenward. There are a thousand ways besides serious reasoning, to live in this world just as if it were utterly Christless—just as if the best of all possible success were to evade the divine light that streams from the gospel of Christ upon that path of life which shines brighter and brighter unto the full-orbed day of final success in heaven.

After all other methods of resisting the life-claims of the gospel have been exhausted, there often remains the process of cunningly avoiding the Christ-truth.

It is not always necessary to run out of sight of sacred things in order to avoid them. In the very place where God delights to reveal his gracious presence to the yearning spirit of right faith, there the spirit of unfaith may skulk, just as the first fallen Adam skulked behind the trees in the beautiful garden of the Lord. The sounds that fall upon the dull ear of unfaith, even in the very house of God, suggest no moving, inspiring thoughts of God and heaven to the soul preoccupied with

sordid ideas. The time that should be sincerely devoted to worship is given to searching for flaws in the human material of the spiritual temple of Christ, just as one looks for knots in lumber, that he may scold the designer and builder of a house. The right spirit of worship will recognize in the religion which God offers for man's acceptance that which gives the mind profound peace, fills the mind with the most glorious beauty, turns the mind in the direction which leads to God, and pleases as no art can please the soul.

Whether men will or will not, their natural lives are swiftly passing. Now they are at the point of life where, by an easy act of trust, they can take Christ by the hand; and now—they are borne beyond the point. They can now return only through a more difficult effort of the will than they have made before. They will be tempted to avoid the paths where Christ most loves to walk. They look at their soiled hands, and hide them. They skulk behind the most convenient habit that will keep them away from the house of God.

In every house of worship, where Christ the Lord is faithfully preached, there are processes going on in the minds of men which fully verify the predictions of the gospel concerning its own vicissitudes, as exhibited in the character and conduct of free men on the earth. As in Christ's Parable of the Sower, the heavenly seed of Christ-truth is sown in earthly soil, and some of it is lost.

In every Christian congregation there are some who are growing better; others who are growing worse—there is either progress or retrogression of religious life. No one is without spiritual movement, either toward or away from heaven. He who is moving toward the Christian heaven, feels some degree of respect for Christianity, notwithstanding some perplexities of belief in his mind. In the depths of his honorable soul he feels some degree of sympathy with the Christian character and life, and does not sullenly shrink from contact with the thoroughly Christian believer. What devout men call the house of God is very far from appearing as a pagan temple to him who is moving toward the Christian heaven.

He whose spiritual movement is away from the Christian heaven, often frets in the house of God, is like one who goes out before the benediction, sees here and there a stunted man of Christian profession, pronounces the Christian life a delusion, and doubts that there ever was in all the world a person as good as Jesus the Son of God. This man passes out from the house made with hands, goes beyond the sound of the human voice that preaches Christ, sullenly slinks away from the sound of singing and praying. He makes his escape from Christ. Is he a victor, or is he a moral coward? Is the Lord Jesus Christ defeated because this man runs away? Is the mission of Christ to mankind a failure because this man dodges responsibility?

Men will ring the old, old changes on such words as "creed," "superstition," "priestcraft," "hypocrisy," "reason." They will tell you that it is of no possible use to pray; for God knows what we need, if, indeed, we need God at all. They will never whisper to you of the peace which nestles in the heart that is made tender by the prayer of trust in the Lord. They will tell you that in the midst of fixed laws of nature there is no room for the play of any special divine providences for any special divine purposes. They may not tell you how foolishly they "wait for something to turn up" to save them from digging for something to eat. They are the slaves of special chances, who ought not to twit the children of God for their faith in special providences.

It may be put down to the credit of the religious instinct in a man's soul, that he can not always, at any time he chooses, coolly dismiss the claims of religion; but it is a shame for him to skulk out of sight of the cross of Christ because in its presence he can neither break it down nor keep it from touching his heart.

How many are using soft pleasures to lull the conscience, and to take the sharp edge from moral convictions! These are the pleasures which make one to appear like an innocent child of nature. He laughs; he plays; he sings; he cries only with a smile shining through his tears,—but, for all this, he is not a real child of God. Give him a religious duty to perform

that is not pleasant at the moment, and he frets. You will see that he has been using his pleasures as foils against the Holy Spirit's approaches to his heart. Playing down here like a child in the sunshine of earth, a whole universe of divine joys has been hidden from his gaze. As easily as a little child lifts its eyes and looks into the sky, this child of nature might enter a new world, and be a man, without in the least spoiling the instincts of his childhood. To be childlike will not spoil a man's science, if his science is not spoiling his heart. Neither will it spoil his play, if he is not playing like a fool.

There are those who are running a desperate race to keep themselves clear of the holy influences of the gospel of Christ. They but thinly disguise the fact that they stay away from the churches because they know that they are not sufficiently strong or confirmed in their unbelief to feel at ease while the divine claims of Christ are every Sunday pressed upon their attention, held up before their eyes, dinned into their ears, stinging their conscience, inviting the affections of their reluctant hearts. From year to year they become more averse to a decided change of habits of life. They very well know that, at the first serious intention to reform, a mass of rubbish must be cleared away from their lives. It is not that which they conceive that the Holy Spirit is to do, which they fear and from which they shrink; it is rather the work which the con-

scious self is to do. They have become morally lazy, and they know it whenever they make a slight effort of religious thinking. They have common sense enough to know that they must take some pains to reform, and that they can not do it all in a single day.

There are some people who profess to be Christians, and fail to be honest men. There are others who profess to be honest men, and fail to be sincere Christians. This boasted honesty, which a man exhibits as the adornment of his non-profession of Christ, is often simply another name for the clear intention to dodge anything that tends to infuse into his life the life of Christ. He is not at all heroic. At every turn of his natural life he is dodging the significance of the divinely straightforward life of the Redeemer of men. His own crooked course, this "artful dodger" calls straight. He does not stand up and say: "I am a sinner. I will mend my life, the grace of God assisting me." He is ashamed of such an honest attitude as that before God and fellow-men; but he is proud to say: "I know that I am not a good man, but I do not intend to be a hypocrite." That settles the matter. *There* is virtue; there is honesty; there is a shining example of rebuke of all the world's hypocrisy! This man will secure a measure of applause sufficient to satisfy his soul. We do not argue with him about the matter of fact which he advances with so much unction of natural honesty. He carries no

counterfeit of religion; but he makes without regret a confession which leaves one in painful uncertainty as to what he may counterfeit before he runs all his wayward course beneath the Sun of righteousness.

XI.

JOY EXTRAORDINARY—DUTY ORDINARY.

THE gospel of Christ misapprehended—this is one of the vicissitudes of the precious seed of Christ-truth illustrated by the Parable of the Sower.

Mere physical sensations misapprehend Christ. Merely superficial character misapprehends him. He is misapprehended when superstitiously used merely as a talisman against evil—when his bleeding flesh veils his Divinity from the sensual eye of unfaith. The Lord Jesus Christ is misapprehended when a transient exhilaration of animal spirits is mistaken for the profound change of heart, in the light of the Divine countenance, which follows one's insight into the inner world which the senses conceal from the eye of faith in spiritual and divine things.

The heavenly message of Christ too often has been but feebly and superficially grasped, even though with much demonstration of emotion and much perturbation of sensations, in certain conditions of mind ill prepared to retain divine truth essential in the formation of firm Christian character.

Second-hand notions of salvation have taken precedence of what may be termed the process of Christian characterization—the impressing of the real character of Christ in the soul. The influences of the Holy Spirit have been lodged in mere strata or folds of ecclesiastical traditions and prejudices that have made men mere imitators of sacred things, of the divine significance of which they had not the slightest comprehension. In this case there were really no fresh openings of the heart to the divine impressions that quicken character fit for heaven; or, if there were such openings, they were quickly closed—as a tender flower closes at the first frost—when religious duty called, showing that the Christ-truth, for life, was misapprehended.

It is very evident that the Savior, in his Parable of the Sower, had in view a class of people who, in a manner, receive the gospel for but little, if any, more than a superficial or fictitious joy. They are persons who depend too much on transient surface emotions and sensations in religion, and who think but lightly of the gravity and solemn grandeur of the religion of Jesus.

There *is* a deep, rich joy in the real experience of the grace of Christ; but many get an erroneous idea of it because, in their thoughts and purposes, they divorce Christian joy and Christian duty.

In every community there are many who believe in a vague way that Christ is the Savior of men, who, nevertheless, go on sinning. They do

not take hold of the vital idea of divine forgiveness of sin. They do not take the idea into their minds for practical use. It does not shine out on straightforward paths toward heaven. Thousands of such people might, by a more specific trust in the Divine Savior, fill this land with the glory of Christ. They might act all the time like men fully persuaded that their sins are forgiven, and be intensely thankful; but instead of this, they leave to shallow souls, in whom the seed of Christ-truth takes no deep root, to displease the unbelieving world with a transient, vaporous joy that rises from no depths of the soul, and rises indeed from the surface of the soul only in unpromising circumstances of outward and violent excitement.

The man who weeps like a child of nature because he intensely feels that he has sinned against his God, changes from heaviness of spirit to overflowing, buoyant gladness, as a child bounds from grief to joy, with a suddenness that surprises the stolid man of the world. The agony of his conviction of sinfulness rends his soul. His sorrow gnaws at his heart. The sky above him changes to blackness. As long as men continue to sin like childish thinkers, it is not to be expected that they will return to God like majestic philosophers. When the nervous system breaks down with grief and alarm, it is not strange that joy comes in like a flood when Christ appears like a real Deliverer.

The day may come when all men may be trusted

with a less violent conviction of sinfulness, and still sincerely and practically repent toward God, if they do wrong; when habits of sin, now scarcely recognized as wrong, shall make men really sad; when settled peace, rather than vaporous ecstasy, shall follow the sadness of a soul that is thoughtful of God and religious duty; when religious joyousness shall be the frequent result of the soul's steadfast gazing into heaven, at the points of view where opening heaven shines most brightly on the pathway of religious duty.

Christian joy often rises as high above the level of one's ordinary life as sorrow for the past of his life of sin sinks below that level. A purer joy may indeed be more quiet, may rise higher, and keep more steadily on the wing. Just as long as men are found who are thoughtless of all religious experiences until the soul is mad with its want and hunger, and danger assumes most horrid shape, we shall see the outward signs of sudden, violent changes; and men, as they come to the cross of Christ, will continue to manifest a wild, delirious joyousness, which is the reaction from the uncontrollable fear and sorrow that urged them to seek relief at the cross of Christ.

We do not base the entire evidence of the truth of the gospel on nothing more than feelings; still there is real joy closely following real faith in the Divine Savior. The joy nestles in the soul very close to the faith. One may receive Christ down

deep in his soul, to yield him a glorious joy forever; or he may feel only an agitation of the surface, or a transient sensation. If there is anything in sin which one may reasonably fear; if the fear may become a pain, and the pain may pass away only through the hope of the gospel and faith in Christ,—well may the soul that had become dulled by sin, rejoice, once at least, with joy beyond description, though the earthly life thereafter be one long trial, sustained only by the undercurrent of religious peace and occasional glimpses of gladness shining on the rough places in the pathway of Christian duty.

The recollection of the initial joy of the convert is not to be regarded as a talisman against all moral danger for the future. All along the course of the gospel of Christ on earth are blasted lives, like withered trees in thin and rocky soil—lives of men who received the Savior when danger pressed, who found relief in momentary belief; but the roots of their joy were scorched by the first fiery temptation or trial.

There is a joy of conversion in a penitent's suddenly vitalized hope of heaven; not the mature hope of the faithful old pilgrim whose sore feet have carried him through the thorny way, at last, near the home which life's trials have made immediately welcome to his heart. The hope of which we speak just now is the hope of heaven which we sometimes see flashing in the soul as from the ashes

of the dead past. Poor, poverty-stricken penitent! Heaven had seemed to him for years like a far-off, fantastic dream. He had thought of heaven only as far away, utterly beyond his reach. In his vision there had appeared only the cold, white outlines of a religious temple in the distant sky. Unearthly angels flitted here and there in the somber light. Graves had been closed over, and grave human spirits had gone up to sing in the high, rare atmosphere which stifles the breath of natural life.

It is possible that the joy born of the first hope of heaven in many a soul is far more unnatural than God designed for the human heart on earth. It may be that heaven, though beautiful, appears too far away, and that there are false notes in the song of joy strained for so great a distance. There is, indeed, a joy of hope springing from the very bosom of a sorrow stained with sin, yet which is wedded to an intelligent, high, and holy purpose of Christian life; and there is a joy which is little more than a tickled fancy of heaven in souls too shallow for any vigorous purpose of real amendment of life.

There is a hope of heaven which suddenly illumines the heart sick of sin. There is a sudden, sharp, overpowering turn of one's thoughts heavenward. There is a veiling, for the instant, of the weary route, the refining fire, the pauses, the starts, the tests, the disappointments, in the Christian course of life. There is a clearing away of the things of sense that too often blind the eye of faith

to the "substance of things hoped for." There is the Christian hope of heaven that is infinitely more than fancy. We need to be converted over as often as this world confines our souls in its hard crusts. Instead of one, and only one, rigid conversion to serve for this life and the next, let there be frequent illuminations of a well-sustained hope of heaven, on the way to heaven wherein a dutiful Christian is vigorously walking.

How often we cheat our own souls, giving them the hope of heaven that is not earned by obedience, in the place of the peace that attends the faithful performance of our religious duties! We could not be so easily robbed if we were not so willing to yield our souls to the illusions of the senses. There are specters before the eye of our faith; and we pursue them, running where the Lord has told us not to go. We are like children chasing the bright spots floating in the air immediately after the eyes have looked at the sun. Yet have we not, with the natural eye, looked into the sun though millions of miles of luminous cloud inwrapped its central fire? Have we not looked into heaven, however thick the luminous cloud that veiled the majesty of Him who sits upon the throne? O the joy that blessed the heart when first, after weary years of sinning, we sincerely looked toward and longed for heaven, and beheld what the purified fancy embellished! If we cherish with reasonable religious care, as long as we live on earth, the "hope that maketh not

ashamed," we need not be ashamed of that first joy, though it may not come again just as at the first.

To be overpowered by excess of emotion does not invariably convey to our minds the idea of the supernatural. A trance in the name of religion is not unquestionably a miracle. There is a marked difference between the volatile emotions of one who trusts to the external machinery of religious excitements, and the joy of another who distinctly traces in his soul the reason for his rejoicing. The latter feels his spirit reconstructed. His soul is responsive to the chaste beauty of holiness. His spiritual vision is cleared; clouds have melted away in the light of heaven. His new horizon stretches far away beyond the confines of earth. He knows that the Savior met him at the moment of his extraordinary trust. He is supported, he knows, though he falls into invisible arms. Is not his very trust something new, wonderful, and blessed? Where is the sense in saying that God must be approached, if approached at all, only by the senses? Precious new sense of the soul—if we must talk of sense—that can touch the Everlasting, who gave the mountains their shapes and the seas their bounds! The soul that has realized the birth of its new power of trust in God, foresees, as by a spiritual or religious instinct, something of its use in the future.

It can not be denied that very many have so misapprehended the gospel as to substitute a sen-

sual love of joy, even in religion, for the chaste, heavenly joy of love. They approached the Savior with something of the manner of going to a wedding. The invitation to a wedding conveyed to their minds a vision of the gross feast—it had something of the flavor and the exhilaration of sparkling wine. They thought of the beauty and gayety, music and dancing. They dreamed that it would be a jovial change from the dull monotony of their days to go to a wedding. Where social life is vaporous and thin, and one's surroundings are dull and listless, his satiated little soul may find a new satisfaction in astonishing his neighbors in a new rôle of joy outside the ordinary channel of their lives. At the same time he does not exhibit any extraordinary veneration for religion. He uses the sublime mysteries of religion as fuel to feed a flame like the flash from gunpowder.

That joy must be fictitious—there must be something of pseudo-religious sensationalism in it—which lifts one apparently to the very gate of heaven, and then, in a few days, abruptly drops him back to the very same spot of earth's dust and mire that he had left. There is something wrong in such gymnastics of religious joy. There is something weak in this joy besides the ordinary frailty of human nature. If we see that a multitude every year go up with a single bound to heaven's gate, only to fall back immediately upon the hard earth, not to rebound until they are dashed again as upon a spring-

board, why not try to lead them by a more peaceful—though, at first, not so exhilarating—way, along a plainer path of Christian duty, with proper recreations, to home at last, with better religious common sense?

In the course of the Christian journey home, it will be seen how this joy *extraordinary* is often in conflict with duty *ordinary.*

XII.

THIN SOIL.

THE Lord Jesus Christ clearly foresaw and plainly pointed out, in the Parable of the Sower, the class of people who receive the gospel with great demonstration of joy, and in a very short time fall away from it without regret.

We need not always be deceived as to the Christ-likeness of the Church by the mere numbers that, for a short time, appear to be taking the kingdom of heaven by storm. The Lord did not make a mere arithmetical calculation. He did not intimate that those who rejoice only for a season, and then speedily fall away, should always outnumber, in a season of religious revival, those who count the cost of a Christian course of life. The bare fact that in every community a multitude of people may be, with comparative ease, manipulated into a nervous, characterless joyousness for a season, should be, to the thoughtful Church, a constant caution. The Savior referred plainly to the peculiar susceptibility of this class of people. He has warned us that there are ways of stirring these airy susceptibilities which will do this class of people no real, permanent, religious good. It is not best for them to have the sweets of the gospel thrown down

their throats as a reward for their simple effort of holding their mouths wide open. They have notions of "getting religion" from revival to revival just as often as their insipid natural lives require a new sensation. They should be shamed out of such notions.

The sprouts of morbid joy in the thin soil of the revival-field are continually reappearing, though repeatedly cut down to the ground. There is also a sickly sentimentalism that feeds upon traditions of past revivals—revivals under peculiar conditions which do not now exist, and with phases which can not, in the nature of things, be reproduced. Yet this sensationalism struggles for a conspicuous place amidst the new, but not the less genuinely religious or Christian, channels of thought that mark the quickened life of the Church of the present.

Anything that is worth thinking about at all should have, and will have, its seasons of quickening in our minds. Why should we make an exception in the instance of religion? Anything that has any claim on our belief as of the highest value, should certainly throw around us at times the spell of an intense realization—even the realization of the supernaturally spiritual. While we are in our flagging flesh and blood we will become familiar with divine things, and call them natural. The spiritual force and significance will die out of things while we handle them. The significance of

heavenly things will escape our minds in stale definitions. The liability to weariness is wrapped up in our earthly nature. There is a certain amount of waste going on in the process of any man's growing.

We believe in seasons of the simultaneous thinking of a mass of people on one and the same subject. Such seasons will come as long as men live together on earth—in religion as well as in other things—whether we believe in them or fight against them. There is as much of law in these seasons of revival *en masse*—as much of spirit and of sense—as in the ebb and flow of the individual life. And these revivals *en masse*, just as in the case of the individual, are subject to criticism and censure if they go wrong.

Enthusiasm—God coming in and filling the soul—often becomes fanaticism before men are aware that God has abandoned them to the vagaries of their own minds. Men have gone astray like sheep—and like sheep they have come back to God—in flocks. Still, in the case of the flock that has wandered and scattered, the Good Shepherd may gather them up one by one, and take to his bosom to warm the solitary lamb, lost in the wilderness, shivering with cold. There is hope of many, sinning with a marked individuality, each of whom may return at the Master's call, like the one lost sheep in the wilderness. We believe in the revival *en masse*. We believe also in these men,

capable of isolated enthusiasm—the zeal of the individual when he makes up his mind and a revival has taken place in himself.

The people who, in the visible Church to-day, exemplify the most thoroughly practical, thoughtful, and vigorous Christian character are often found to be those who, in the process of reaching a rational zeal-point, most clearly preserve their individuality. The source of their new purpose of personal religious life was not the peculiar blaze of a general revival. It may have been that the flame of a strong and genuine religious purpose, on the part of these exemplary Christians, kindled in the minds of combustible people a blaze which was only the transient semblance of religious zeal, and which speedily burned out. There was the mockery, by a wild crowd, of the rational zeal of the few in whose quickened purpose there was the promise of ripe fruit of practical Christian life.

In every community there is a crowd of injudicious people who feed the blaze and starve the hungering individual. They are never satisfied with one's purpose until he acts as if he had *no* religious purpose. They are never satisfied with a revival until, like boys at a bonfire, they have piled on trash sufficient to extinguish it. Years afterward is seen, here and there, a person who has survived such a revival. A multitude there are, deposited by such a revival, piled up in the Church, like decayed, useless driftwood.

The Master Sower is sowing the seed over a wide range of fields. There is a sense in which it may be said that the revival-field is the rocky field, the field of thin soil. It is in this field that we most frequently witness the antics of sensations mistaken for the graces of the Spirit. It is in this field that we meet with the class of people, in large numbers, whom the Savior describes as "receiving the word with joy, and having no root." If we diligently work to gather the rocks out of this field, we may gather in a more substantial harvest of good wheat. The field needs cultivating; it needs top-dressing and subsoiling. It *is* a field, and is not to be given up as hopelessly useless.

The master designs to keep us at work in *all* his fields. There *is* some good, deep soil in the crevices of the rocks in this revival-field. Some good wheat grows there; but we suspect that good wheat may be produced in other fields that are worth cultivating. All the land is Christ's. We see much rich, ripe fruit all around—lives of Christians active in practical charity, energetic in religious enterprise, patient in tribulation, heroic in the face of temptation—fruit which did not spring up in what we call the revival-field, nevertheless in the Master's fields, and, doubtless, in the vision of the Master Sower when he said, "The fields are white unto the harvest."

We are under no necessity of depreciating genuine revivals in order to appreciate the people who "join

the Church" from time to time in seasons of religious calm, and resolutely go straightforward. There must be revivals; the Church without them becomes as a stagnant pool. The waters need stirring and sweetening. The best Christians, ever and anon, need that they should "stir the gift of God that is in them." However, he who goes straightforward faithfully in the path of Christian duty will not fail to have *his* revival. The Lord, in the providence which attends Christian life, will not suffer the dutiful soul to wear out with never a fragrant breath of springtime. A revival is to the dutiful soul a time of *refreshing*. The stillness preceding the time of refreshing is not in his case the stillness of death nor the calmness of indifference to the grace of the Lord.

What permanent religious good comes to the world through perpetuating morbid joy? It was nothing more than morbid joy, springing from souls of no depth, implied in Christ's description of the class of persons who "receive the word with joy," and almost immediately "fall away." It can not be truly said that they are blameless in having no depth of soil. There is enough soil about any responsible human life to produce some fruit other than this morbid joy. The man who lazily and indifferently receives the seed of anything and everything that grows, is wearing away and wasting the soil.

There will not be any the less genuine, whole-

some joyousness in a community where faithful, steady-going, wholesomely-growing Christians have discouraged morbid religious sensationalism. There will not be any the less rational prospect of a revival which shall set Christ in a clearer light, and that shall quicken the pulse of cheerful Christian effort, in a community where the blazing of distorted religious passions and the delirium of religious feverishness have been discouraged or discountenanced. Not one more ignorant soul will be lost for the time spent in clearing away the rubbish and in putting more soil on Christ's revival-field.

Has not the Master Sower been waiting long for his subordinate sowers of the precious seed to do something more in order to get more soil on the rocks? The seed of Christ-truth has been shamefully wasted where long since it should have taken deeper root.

XIII.

TEMPTATION.

THE highest perfection of liberty is to do exactly as one pleases, without pleasing to do wrong. God is educating men on earth for liberty in heaven. There is a "glorious liberty of the children of God." Every one loves to do as he pleases, and to feel that his actions smoothly follow the bent of his inclination. Man is pleased with the consciousness that he is a monarch, though his domain is comparatively small.

The noblest Christian character on earth is formed through the right use of liberty. This personal character is penetrated through and through with the consciousness of freedom. Good character, which bears the impress of heroic struggle against temptation is the beginning of liberty that has something of heaven in it.

Has one foolishly prayed that God would make him a sort of iron-clad man, whom powerful evils might pelt without touching his feelings? He wants to be armored so as to sail onward without resisting evil, or to give battle without danger. He wants every exquisite feeling, except the consciousness of practical freedom to quit playing with the evil which is too strong for play. He wants to

play like a child with fire, and not be burned. He wants liberty, without its incidents and its perils, while he is reaching its end. He wants God to educate him by closing up all the avenues of his soul which evil may enter, notwithstanding he needs just such openings of the soul for the formation of responsibly good character.

Say that the Lord converts a soul by inspiring it with divine love which is given him by the Holy Spirit. Does he not remember that, "where the Spirit of the Lord is, there is liberty?" Does he not know that liberty in this world, where the air is full of evils, will almost immediately subject him to the test of an earthling? Yes, an earthling—a candidate for the higher perfection of the liberty of heaven.

The Holy Spirit is ready, and graciously willing to help an earthling. A soul conscious of coldness may be warmed in the love of God. A sinner purposing to lead a new life may find the Divine Comforter whom Christ promised, with whom to start in a new life. At the very start he may have a wrong idea, or no idea, of temptation, and fail.

Happy in temptation? Not exactly; but happy in victories over temptation. One rejoices in the illumination of his soul's first definite approach to the Sun of righteousness. He is new-born of the Spirit. Old things—even the old world of nature—have become new, transfigured before his eyes. His soul rests like a sleeping infant in the midst of

dangers that appall the stout-hearted. His spirits are soothed as by the spell of heavenly singing. What will he do after a few days, when the scene of dazzling, heavenly light changes, and earthly things are again clothed in their more somber colors? How will he use his liberty when his old self recognizes his old habits and associations, and struggles with his old fondness for things which in his new purpose of life he had repudiated? What will he do? Let us hope that he will regard the renovated determination to get out of the way of temptation as speedily and wisely as possible as a part of that process which was made significant by joy in the Holy Spirit.

When one's heart is religiously changed for the better, not everything outside of his heart is changed at the same time. The man with a changed heart may look even from the divine glory of his illumination, and make a mistake. The little child may not yet play with impunity upon "the hole of the asp."

You have seen a class of people gulp notions of salvation, and fill themselves like religious gormands. The fine gold clutched by unclean hands has become dim before your eyes. You have been astonished to see how a coarse, sensual nature may appropriate the fine things of religion, to which finer natures have attained only through patient growth in grace, trials faithfully endured, and temptations vanquished.

You have been surprised to observe such a large number of people, after so much that has appeared extraordinary—after violently rejoicing for a brief season—"fall away" with the most ordinary temptation. Their exaltation was into the region altogether removed from the evils in ordinary life, which the patient wayfaring man must surmount, or go around in a natural way, with a will religiously determined.

The Heavenly Father loves his child, tempted, just as much as he loved his child when it looked up with the first smile of its new religious life, and met the light of God's countenance. We doubt not that the Father looks as graciously and tenderly upon the soul in its first temptation as he looks upon it in its first love. Is not God prepared for the contingencies in the life of one who, with the joy of a new, heavenly life in his soul, starts out on an untried path? The young convert, in the temptation that surprises him, need not doubt the love of God, who knows it all from the beginning.

An old besetting sin suddenly springs up in the path of the young convert, and stares him in the face—the face still shining with the radiance of the heaven into which he has just been rapturously gazing. He had not thought that this sin, in just these circumstances, would again confront him; but it meets him, just as he happens to meet a person on the street. Shall he impatiently cry out,

"The Divine Presence does not shield me?" Shall the love that was just beginning to exalt his life expire, because the Lord, in permitting him to confront a temptation so unexpectedly, seems—only seems—in the dim light of his faith, to have abandoned him to an accident of religious life? Let him remember that when he was first a child of God, he thought as a child; he played as a child plays, with the sparkle of sunbeams on the ground. Now let him look above the darkling "powers of the air." There *is* brightness beyond. If he enter not into temptation—if he play not with the ugly sins, nor become familiar with them—he will soon see more of the divine love than he did when it first touched his soul with its sweet surprise; for the love of God will be recognized as his shield, if he is determined to be valiant.

Let no one, in his seasons of religious exaltation, suppose that his imagination alone is sufficient to deal with his temptations. Agreeable fancies may go with him to the place of temptation. Experience of hard realities is constantly rectifying the mistakes that he makes in his excursions of fancy. He comes down from his glorious elevation to attend to some of the simple duties of life. It is good for him often to act like an ordinary mortal. It is good for him sometimes to rise on wings sublime, and view himself forever more than mortal; but for the present he is engaged to keep his soul from being sullied by some little meanness;

some rash misconduct; some vein of dishonesty, with a tendency to run through his life—a bad streak which no fancy can embellish.

Would you have the Almighty lift you as by a whirlwind, as if to hurl you over a mountain, in order to get you on another side of that over which you can easily step? Does one need a beatific vision to keep him from lying or cheating, to prevent his being cross or cruel? Truth, honesty, and kindness are glorified close to the earth, in the light of the sun. One is sometimes tempted to mar the glory of common truth and honesty for the sake of a little temporal advantage. He is tempted to give his temper a little license at the expense of the comfort of his friends. These temptations are of a nature not to be smothered with fancies dropping from the glory on high, into which one idly gazes, instead of cultivating the common but useful fruit of a Christian life. Even the first Adam had something to do, to take care of the useful as well as the ornamental, in his Garden of Eden.

One need not laboriously search for the thorniest way to heaven. He need not distress his soul with fears that he is in the wrong way because no thorns pierce his flesh; but having received the gospel with joy, let him not therefore jump to the conclusion that the Lord has entirely exempted him from meeting temptation like a man.

The failure at the start manfully to grapple

with temptation often determines a low grade of character that scarcely deserves the name Christian. There is little in it of the manly struggle which, with the grace of the Lord, develops strength of character. It is a grade of character called Christian, because it is propped up for a time by a theory of salvation received at first "with joy," but with little besides joy. It is easy, in theory, to fly to the very gate of Paradise with nothing but the soul's very cheap delight. But let one fly heavenward on the impulse given him by victories over temptations on the ground. It is best for his life that there should not be too conspicuous alternating of groveling and glorying. Let rejoicing be modest till to the testimony of the Divine Spirit is added the testimony of his own spirit—the consciousness of victory over temptation, that increases the capital on which manhood does large religious business. Then, when tempted and victorious, he may take excursions to heaven for religious recreation.

XIV.

TRIAL.

TRIALS are not joyous. A thorn in the flesh does not a particle of good. It is nothing but a sharp pain, unless the spirit gets something that shows itself above thorns—something that reveals the sufficiency of the grace of God through all the earthly stage of the journey of life, however beset with difficulties.

With an extraordinary mission on earth, the first disciples of Christ passed through ordinary trials of the earthly life. Their enthusiasm was not a divorce from the ordinary life of mankind. Their contact with the divine in Christ did not dehumanize them. When they remembered that Jesus had said, "In the world ye shall have tribulation," they were reminded that, with all their inspiration for a special divine purpose, with all the greatness of their divine mission, they were just like other men, subject to the trials of ordinary human life.

One can not preach too much joy to a person who has good sense sufficient to discern something of the divine meaning of trial. Strong sense invariably repudiates the idea of doing a large business of religious joy on a small capital of patience and tribu-

lation. A healthy-working Christian does not receive from the Master for his daily wages, sky-rockets, which amuse for a moment, and then burn out for nothing.

There are people who have found the ground-plan of heaven, and are trying their feet awhile before they soar with wings as angels. They have almost graduated in the school of matter-of-fact trial on the ground. More joy, more heavenly glory to shine on earthly things, will do them religious good. Perhaps they may now be trusted with more glory. Let the familiar house of worship now shine in their eyes like a glorious temple. Let the wings of cherubim fan the altar where they kneel in the dust by the familiar railing. Let the old bell of the church ring out for them glad tidings, the very reverberation of happy singers in heaven.

Trials are not to be regarded as the Lord's experiments in a converted soul, as if to discover something he did not already know. Trials are rather to make one know himself in some degree as the Lord knows him. Trials are divine processes, rather than divine experiments in the human soul. Christ led a blind man away from the crowd. He made no experiment; he knew exactly what he could do; he opened the man's eyes. God sends an affliction directly to its place. Men call it an affliction—nothing more, nothing less—until they recognize it as a trial, and understand something of its divine meaning, and profit by its lesson.

If a man's conversion be no more than skin-deep, the scratch of a thorn will prove as effectual as an earthquake to open his eyes to the thinness of his peace, the superficiality of his joy, in what he imagined to be the deep conversion of his soul. They are not earthquakes and hurricanes generally that reveal shallow conversions. Very few of the converts in a revival are immediately overtaken by dire calamities. The processes of trial are usually of the most ordinary description. Trial is usually the natural course of natural things crossing a Christian's path; sometimes when he is walking in a straight path, sometimes when he is walking in a crooked path. If a man learns nothing in an ordinary trial, we may safely assert that about all he received in an extraordinary revival was a second-hand presumption concerning the salvation of his soul, and that the character he wears is little better than shoddy.

The Lord graciously prepares his children for "the inheritance of the saints in light." It is not enough merely to be born into the spiritual kingdom; otherwise it would always be best to die with the first breath of heaven. After birth there must be growth; and along with growth there must be experience, and trial is necessary to experience. There is opportunity on earth for the inspiration of trial that makes of the child a man of God. There is a process of experience. God knows all things from the beginning; we know only by experience.

If trials prove that a man's boasted conversion is superficial, then trials are not superfluous. Job came forth as gold from the fiery furnace of his trial. How many, with a far milder trial, show that there is no precious metal in them! They whine under the smart of a switch. There is nothing like "the ring of the right metal" under the ponderous stroke of the hammer.

You have seen souls who imagine that a light, airy joy is a complete equipment for heaven. They imagine that a journey to the world beyond is a very easy, safe undertaking, requiring no special preparation. You have seen these airy souls collapse like bubbles with a breath of trial. The religious joy that has no acquaintance with patience, and the faith the trial of which worketh no patience, are not worth much.

We worldly-wise mortals have many conceits about heaven. It is an office of trials to take these conceits out of us. Do we not sometimes look into heaven by moonlight? Do we not think that the Sun of righteousness is tame compared with the cheap exuberance of our fancy? We have studded the gates of heaven with pearls which cost us nothing. With dry eyes, we look through the pearly gates ajar. It is not just like looking through tears. You have seen saints ripe for heaven, looking heavenward through tears, yearning to be away, ready to go—all very different from the conceit of the recent convert before the Lord has given him any plain

prose of trial to read, before he has learned that in his circumstances his hurry to get to heaven is unbecoming.

Have you not seen conceit about heaven nipped in the bud, when one, acting the part of Job's comforter, had an *argumentum ad hominem* applied in the shape of a sharp trial that came like an unexpected frost in June? Our conceits lead us into innumerable mistakes about the third heaven. Our trials often find us still on the ground, and more wedded to the ground than our vision of so many heavens, rising one above another, leads us to suppose concerning ourselves. The boisterousness of our conceit about our readiness to die has abated at the breath of a sickness that was not unto death. We have discovered in our trials that our fancy graces were only our conceits about the correctness of our creeds. We have not by the orthodoxy of our heads deceived the Lord in the matter of the unsoundness of our hearts. We have found our sublime theory of sanctification a very poor justification of our low practice in some cases. We have found our able demonstration of the resurrection an unreliable offset to our buried charities. We have been compelled in the storm to throw overboard some of the cargo which, in our conceit, we thought we could carry to the other shore better than a larger and stronger craft. A sharp trial has punctured the bombast of our prayers. We say "Our Father" more like real children of the

Heavenly Father; we ask with more humble confidence; we tell the Lord less, and ask him more,—and all this is infinitely better for us than all that we had conceitedly imagined.

Trials uncover mistakes about salvation which the young convert makes in the flush of his joy. How shall he know all about his soul's conversion without being tried? It is better for him to struggle with some open difficulties, and come off victorious, than to be lulled into a false peace by concealed mistakes. There is a pleasure in the sensation of springing at once into the highest glory, ignoring the slow years of trial, which may not be comprehended in the first happy days of the Spirit's converting grace. We may learn to count some weary days in the time of trial before we enter upon the glorious eternity, the days of which are not counted. We read the figures on the milestones as we walk along the road, and think over the details of the journey. The journey, mile by mile, is not just what we had pictured at the outset. The details of the journey from earth to heaven modify the outlook of conversion.

It is one thing to be saved from sin; it is quite another thing to be exempt from trial. In the Lord's economy of grace there is the grace of trial as well as the grace of regeneration. Trials uncover some things that the regeneration of a man's soul does not touch. A converted man's bitter enemies are not subdued and made tender in heart by

the same transforming Divine Spirit that is present in the process of his soul's conversion. Natural difficulties, instead of being removed from one's pathway immediately after conversion, often become more conspicuous. Not infrequently the grace which we regarded as a sure talisman, we find to be a mark for sharpshooters. The trials of the Christian serve to show us that we have something more to do than merely to drift into the permanently higher life—the kingdom of glory.

You have heard of the "sifting of Satan." He is still in the business of sifting, though he now more frequently handles a much smaller sieve of petty persecutions than he did when martyrs sealed their testimony with their blood. Less than blood often tests in these days. When "persecution ariseth because of the word," who are they that stand firm? Not those whose joy springs up like the wheat in rocky soil but an inch deep, which turns pale yellow under the kindly rays of the sun. Their blessedness evaporates in the very face of the Savior's beatitude, "Blessed are they which are persecuted for righteousness' sake." They did not bargain for *that*—they did not look from that mount of beatitudes into the upper kingdom.

Discouraged by a sneer; conquered by a slight social ostracism; turned out of the way by the scratch of a brier; frightened by the bark of a poodle,—such things tell the sad story of failures at the very entrance of that kingdom of God at the

inauguration of which there were heroes who, "through faith, subdued kingdoms, wrought righteousness, obtained promises, stopped the mouths of lions, quenched the violence of fire, escaped the edge of the sword, out of weakness were made strong, waxed valiant in fight, turned to flight the armies of the aliens; . . . had trial of cruel mockings and scourgings, yea, moreover, of bonds and imprisonment; they were stoned, they were sawn asunder, were tempted, were slain with the edge of the sword;" and "who, for the joy that was set before them [like Jesus], endured the cross, despising the shame."

Behold the cross which Christ endured! You read in the light of this cross, salvation; then, rejoice. You read in the light of this cross, if you put together aright the letters traced in blood, trial; then, be patient. The cross on Calvary does not contradict the promise of the crown of life eternal. Only "be thou faithful"—reading aright all the significance of the cross—and the crown shall be thine.

XV.

PRAYING.

FAITHFUL praying, in its relation to Christian fruitfulness of life, is putting on soil and digging. The Lord, in his Parable of the Sower, declares that some precious seed of his truth falls in the thin soil on the rock, and, as soon as it springs up, it withers away, because it lacks moisture. Nevertheless can not the Lord do wonders in the soul of man? Will not miracles of divine grace be performed in the soil of the human heart? Many a wretchedly poor soil might be fertilized and enriched if the idea of praying were enlarged to take in the fullness of God's love, compassion, and gracious nearness, responsive to the trustful yearning of the praying soul.

Many a one troubled in spirit at the discovery that his first marked religious joy was evanescent, may yet learn that there is a praying that fixes in the soul the substance of permanent gladness. He may learn that there is a praying, with watching, that gently holds him back so that he enters not into temptation; that soothes his spirit in trial; that reconciles his spirit to the discipline of suffering; that renews and develops his strength. He may learn that through praying there is a laying on

of successive experiences that enrich the poor soil. The rocks are pulverized; here and there is an oasis in the desert; there is something at least of the beauty of the season of blossoming, with the promise of fruit-bearing.

We think that God looks not unkindly on buds and blossoms, and loves the praying of a poor soul that greatly needs transplanting in a richer soil, and, in his gracious providence, looks out many a richer spot of earth for such a soul, intensely seeking a favorable place for vigorous growth.

Praying must dig deeper than the superficial rejoicing that is merely selfish and short-sighted; must bring the lacked moisture from heaven; must entreat; and, entreating, it may command the dews of heaven.

Away with the dry, technical divisions of prayer! The soul, in its approaches to the living God, is not a dead thing to be dissected. It is alive in its consciousness of spiritual wants. It feels its immortality in its thirst for God. When you attempt to deal out a portion of prayer for saint, a portion for sinner, be careful that you do not kneel under skies that yield no moisture. After you have divided prayer in general into "public, private, family," and so on, and after you have settled the order of "praise, petition, confession," in the single prayer you may say: "Lord, I have done all that I can logically do." Praise of God, all cut and dried, is too often, alas! the conceit of self-worship.

Making a list of confessions of sin, merely for the sake of a proper order of petitions in the logically arranged prayer, is a performance too cool and deliberate in the sight of Him who has all "our secret sins in the light of his countenance."

It is well said that "prayer is the Christian's vital breath." Now if, with the first breath of the atmosphere of heaven, one gets a notion that his habit of praying must enter into a certain routine of laborious duty; that he must say his regular prayers, with just so much measured praise of God, just so many items of confession, just so much thanksgiving for the common blessings of life, just so much measured petition in the line of duty rather than in the line of spiritual yearning,—he gets a wrong idea of Christian life, to begin with. After the first breath of heaven, such a one, with such an idea of prayer, soon loses all practical interest in real Christian life.

One whose praying is like the measured, soulless movement of clock-work can make no sense of praying without words. Well, let us say, there is no sense in it; it is the act of the voiceless spirit rising immeasurably above time and sense. You have felt your soul inexpressibly, unspeakably thirsting for God. No word that you uttered in the prayer of words satisfied your profound consciousness of spiritual want. You knew that the Divine Spirit was searching the depths of your consciousness. You felt that God understood your

wants to which you could give no familiar earthly names. Your spirit has been hushed in adoration. You could not well make a prayer of words; yet your soul was praying. Then to have used all the vocabulary that you had ever learned would have spoiled, would have fallen short of the sacred quality of your devotion; would have been sacrilegious; would have pained you with a sense of drifting away from the sacred presence of the Divine One, saying without words: "Be still, and know that I am God."

Joy, sorrow, hope, trust, adoration—all have their silent phases. They all lie far back of words. Expressive silence is often the soul's recognition of the meaning of the injunction, "Let all the earth fear the Lord; let all the inhabitants of the world stand in awe of him!" There are times for each one of these experiences—joy, sorrow, hope, trust, adoration, fear, love—to be voiced for the hearing of our ears; but he has not the fullness of Christian experience who can express it all in words. The experience that is principally loquacious is not the deepest and the richest of the Christian life. There is an experience that fails when words fail, and there is a praying that ceases when sounds cease; but the one is not the highest experience, nor the other the deepest praying.

Who can with words "pray without ceasing?" Yet there are depths of the soul wherein the spirit of prayer may abide, uninterrupted by all the

surface agitation of the world. Within this deep spirit of prayer there is an undercurrent of spiritual rejoicing that is not for a brief season, but for evermore. It is a rejoicing that whispers to us in pain, that is associated with implicit trust in God, and looks over mountains of difficulty, and that is accepted of God as the voice of supplication.

Let the soul be drawn by the Divine Spirit up into an atmosphere of prayer where breathing—living—is as praying. Let Christian cheerfulness be more steadily the soul's signal of thanksgiving to God. Let the soul's abhorrence of sin be its most expressive deprecation of sin. Let the Christian life itself be a psalm of praise to God. Let mercy, love, and trust, breathing within the soul, be so many phases of supplication to the All-merciful, the All-loving, the All-faithful, who will listen to our words—and interpret them—as he listened to the psalmist's words: "Hear the voice of my supplication when I cry unto thee, when I lift my hands toward thy holy oracle. Let the words of my mouth and the meditation of my heart be acceptable in thy sight, O Lord, my strength and my redeemer!"

The Savior's intimate association of watching and praying is often entirely overlooked. It is a literal watching that is required in the formation of exact Christian character, that will face difficulties and danger. Figures of danger in the distance, storms at sea, the devil's pickets and watch-towers, are well enough as figures of speech, but they are

valueless if they do not lead to literal watching. There are prayers that only play around the real dangers that beset the Christian life. There are prayers that luxuriate in the green pastures of the heavenly Canaan, while well-known dangers are carelessly ignored instead of being practically avoided.

Can you bear to think of all this temporal life as one long vigil? Has not an hour sometimes seemed very long when your eyes were heavy with watching? Can there be any comparatively easy state of mind that may be called perpetual vigilance? Yes, there is a praying that is a looking out from the darkness where moral dangers lurk, to where clear light is shining. Prayerfulness is watchfulness; watchfulness is prayerfulness. The soul in which the spirit of prayer dwells, is the soul on guard. There are critical times when, watching ever so much, as one thinks, he enters into temptation because he is prayerless. There are times when, praying ever so much, as one thinks, he enters into temptation because he is not watching.

There are just as many opportunities about one when he is not praying as there are when he *is* praying; but he sees better when he is praying. O for the praying that translates one into a new world of opportunities; that reveals the horses and chariots of the Lord ready to help; that shows us paths shunned by unsanctified ambitions, wherein we may walk, if we will, and find safety and spiritual peace!

Have you never listened to a merely nominal Christian's prayer which gave you a sensation as if God and heaven were drifting far away, and you fell to thinking of the prayer as you might think of any material thing not too sacred to handle? You recognized the smack of secular comfort in the familiar "Lord, we thank thee that it is as well with us as it is." There was a tone—or absence of tone—in the "Bless the sick and the needy, the world over," that led you to suspect that the suppliant was not acquainted with any such nearer home. You could fancy that he had taken the gospel between his teeth, but was determined not to swallow it.

His praise was others' gold, hammered out for the gilding of his prayer—nothing in it of original conception of the Heavenly Father. His confessions were the formal statement of the "sins of omission" of one who was making the most of being saved by grace, while a passing, general reference to "sins of commission" was thrown in for the sake of euphony—nothing of original, heartfelt regret in all the confessions. Then came the "amen," which signified—if it signified anything—that the main object of a prayer from the beginning is to reach the other end—the "*finis*"—as if one said, "I have said my prayer; the Lord is dismissed."

There is a clear distinction between earnestness and vociferousness in prayer. We need the spirit of prayer that refreshes the soul; not that which exhausts. Prayer is not to be numbered among

the "works" of which evangelical Christians speak so disparagingly (and properly, too) when works are pushed into competition with trust in the Redeemer. Prayer is the breathing of trust in the Lord. It is the gracious privilege of the Christian who has the spirit of obedience; it is the soul's rest and recreation in the midst of work. A whispered word may strike to the heart a deeper dread than the crash of thunder. The still, small voice of God may speak to the soul engaged in voiceless prayer, sublimer things than the roaring tornado, the earthquake, or the fire may tell.

When the Lord invites you into your closet to pray, does he point out that you are to leave the door wide open, that your voice may make proclamation to all in the house that you are engaged in secret prayer? Is there such confusion in your mind concerning vociferousness and earnestness that you know nothing of earnestness in solitude? You are a failure at the start, with all your vehemence, if you can not pray alone. Many a sinful human creature has his most earnest spiritual business to transact alone with the Lord. A human ear at the keyhole of his closet-door would cause his voice sometimes to sink to a whisper, if he is in deep earnest.

There are prayers which go up into the air like balloons, to swell and drift and collapse. We have not greatly wondered at the failures in the very beginning of a rich promise of Christian life, when

we have considered the aimlessness of first prayers; the swelling of the soul with a gaseous joy; the flying to heaven hooked to the bottom of high-sounding prayers.

Praying for the true life of the soul ought to have precedence of the praying for the bliss of heaven. Not that heavenly bliss is not infinitely desirable, but the desire for heaven must needs be nourished by a life of the soul on earth. Heaven should appear as the fit place for the consummation of life in Christ. Earth should appear as the place where it is God's will and pleasure to have the beginning of a spiritual and religious life to emerge from the natural life—to strike its roots in earthly soil, watered by divine grace, and growing heavenward.

What capabilities, what possibilities of life are hidden away in the depths of our being! What inducements there are to pray! Lord, gently remove the folds of this earthly life; let us be drawn close to Christ's unearthliness; teach us the high significance of living on earth; suspend thy judgment while we pray and struggle and trust for the life that is now unfolding within our spiritual nature, while we talk with thee, and while we listen to the Son of God!

XVI.

GROWING.

WE naturally expect a healthy child to grow. If there is no perceptible growth of the body in the course of a year, we suspect a freak of nature interfering with the development of physical manhood. When the years of boyhood or girlhood have passed, and the child grows no larger, we get tired of the fiction when it is said, "This is a boy," or "This is a girl." The ball or the doll is laid aside; the child desires no longer to play with these literal playthings. There is desire to stand, shoulder to shoulder, with men and women in the more serious business of life.

Now, there can be no reasonable objection to a proper childhood of Christian life—the beginning of Christian life; the initial unfolding of the Christian character on earth; religious playfulness; the innocent misconceptions of the beginning; the shrinking from solid work; the over-fondness for sweetmeats,—as compared with that maturity of Christian experience and character to which some attain, notwithstanding their falling short of absolute perfection. There are some who do not die in the infancy of their Christian life. They live to grow. There is a childhood of Christian life which must,

in the very nature and order of life, precede Christian manhood. It is the unnatural, the abnormal childhood, in which there is no growth, no gradation of playing, no progressing from smaller to larger playthings, no dawning of the idea or the desire of being a man or a woman, that disappoints the expectation of thoughtful Christians; for they are deeply interested in the advancement of the Redeemer's kingdom, and this advancement is certainly made along the line of growth from childhood to manhood of Christian experience.

A poet says, "A babe in glory is a babe forever." Be that as it may in the poet's conception of glorified babyhood, the "babe in Christ" here on earth, that holds out no promise of being anything more than a babe; that frets at twenty years just as it fretted at twenty days; that lies puling in the arms of its nursing-mother, the Church, quieted only with pretty spiritual songs, and nursery rhymes, and rattle-boxes, and such things,—ceases to be pleasing, and cries for pity. No, no! the babe in Christ is interesting, not because we conceive that it is to be a babe forever, but because we conceive the possibility of its being forever something more than a baby.

Why should there not be in the Christian conversion of a soul the birth of a distinct desire to grow? Why should we not clearly see that this conversion is but the beginning of a life? The sun in springtime says to the fruit-tree, "Grow, and

bear fruit;" the Sun of righteousness says to the soul, "Grow, and bear fruit."

There are many things in the conversion of a soul analogous to natural infancy and natural childhood, but not everything. The kingdom of nature does not completely illustrate the kingdom of divine grace. A babe has no idea of growing. A man who has just entered the kingdom of Christ is called a "babe in Christ," but *he* may have joy in the thought of going on. He is a babe in that he has commenced a life; he is a child in his new recognition of the Fatherhood of God.

It may be that just now some twists in our moral nature are unavoidable. We are not just as sound at the root as that noble tree, which seems to pray, lifting its symmetrical arms toward heaven. But we need not sit under that tree—one of God's object-lessons for our study—and approve moral monstrosities. We know that thousands claim to have been "born again" who only serve to illustrate spiritual deformity. Have you not seen people start out in what they call a religious life, in a direction in which you, in all your patient thinking about heaven, could see them only inevitably turned back? Certainly, the more they grow in that direction, the greater monstrosities they would be in heaven.

The remarkable phenomena produced by pseudo-religious sensations, we look upon as interfering with the symmetrical growing of the soul in the

genuine grace of God. Dependence on sensations is just so much deficiency of faith in the Son of God. A steady, intelligent faith in Christ clears the way for one to grow from earth to heaven. The moment he demands a sensation to confirm his faith, he asks for that which is inconsistent with faith, which has nothing to do with faith. In the abundance of sensations there is interference with the soul's symmetrical growth in grace. Right growth in grace does not cast discredit on divine grace.

We see in the beginning of a Christian life much that resembles the swelling of buds on our fruit-trees in spring-time, the season of budding. The budding is a promise of growing far enough to produce substantial fruit. We would be astonished to see ripe fruit hanging on the tree where there had been no buds. We see nature is full of growing things. It would strike us as most unnatural to see many things at once reach perfection, after their kind, without any process of growing.

It appears, according to the Lord's method of dealing with us, that he regards experience as one of the best things that he, in his providence, can give us human creatures on the earth where he has placed us. We glibly talk of religious experience. We do not seem to value this religious experience as the Lord values it for us. We sometimes talk largely and positively about a perfect religious experience, as if it had nothing on earth to do with what we may term our earthly life-impression—the

impression made in our life by the innumerable things of earth that we see, hear, and touch.

In fact, processes of growing are blended in our lives. The child of God by grace—by new spiritual birth—and the child of nature grow together in the same person. We do not say that every impression in the life of the child of nature marks him a failure as to the grace of God, an alien from the kingdom of divine grace; but we do say that he is to be regarded as a failure at the start and from the start, if he commence with the grace of God that makes him glad, and does not soon grow far enough to produce some substantial fruit of grace in whatever circumstances of natural life he may be placed.

If God designs and knows that a man is yet to live fifty years on earth, certainly some views of heaven are reserved to be given through experience, both of divine grace—purely spiritual and religious—and experience of the things that make up the natural and ordinary part of life. There is a perfection, or maturity, that can come only through growing. It is that maturity for which God, in his providence, allows the experience of years on earth.

The term "grace" in the mouths of many sincere people is of most vague significance. It suggests to our minds a variety of spiritual atmospheres and spiritual moods. Nothing is definitely settled in our minds when we hear some people talk very positively of "growing in grace." We must first know what they mean by "grace."

What is their idea of a beginning of "grace?" What conception of growing have they? What will be the practical result of their going on, ever so far, in their style of grace? Will their style of spirituality become more intense only to see nothing but gracelessness in any modification of their style? What is the use in their parading their "wonderful" growth in grace before the eyes of one of refined spiritual perception, to whom the quality, the tone, the flavor of their grace are offensive; who perceives that the more they have of what they call grace, the less to the credit of the gospel of Christ? Why should they persist in annoying people with their theory while there is nothing in the fact of their state of grace, nor in their practice, to convince men that it is of rare heavenliness?

"Grace," in the view of some people, is a certain peculiar feeling or sensation which rises and falls like the mercury in a thermometer. When it rises to a certain point, which may be termed blood-heat, we hear: "I feel that I am growing in grace." We hear this at every recurrence of that same state of feeling. We hear it repeated as if there were no variety of the phases of divine grace, no blending of a multitude of Christian feelings in the one habit of feeling of the growing man—growing as every man in some degree may grow who has any inwrought sense of the duty of Christian thinking.

The Spirit of Christ can not be attained by any amount of that knowledge which, for distinction, is

termed knowledge of this world. No soul that has imbibed the spirit of the gospel of Christ will dispute the insufficiency of unsanctified knowledge; yet we fear that there is much absurd talking about growth in grace which takes but little account, or no account, of corresponding growth in knowledge. Of course we do not refer to merely technical knowledge; we do not refer to the merely ignorant man—for who is not ignorant?—but to the ignorant man stereotyped, who makes no appreciable natural growth, while he talks incessantly, loudly, aimlessly, of growth in grace.

The man who has no idea of religious education—the drawing out and enlarging of the soul through Christianly religious experience—has a vague notion of being filled with the grace of God—something almost material oozing from material means of grace, put into him in greater and greater measure while the man grows no larger. There is no clear distinction in his mind between gross feeding and growing. He makes the sad mistake of accepting the activity of his lowest faculties in religion as conclusive evidence of a larger growth than in the case of others, whose higher faculties have received a gentler baptism of the Divine Spirit.

Let Christian conversion be regarded more in the light of means to an end. Let better Christian thinking be encouraged, instead of silly sensations in the name of religion. Let revivals still reveal

glorious opportunities for starting in earnest religious life, and uncover means of growing—which are implied in means of divine grace—unnoticed in the midst of life's sordid cares and engrossing sinful pleasures. Let us seek the things which contain the glowing signs of growing, wherein we read the promises of successful life in Christ.

XVII.

CARES.

THERE is a phase of worldly-mindedness that is impervious to the Spirit of Christ, and misapprehends the gospel. There is a phase of worldly-mindedness modified by a partial acceptance of the gospel, giving rise to a type of character—part religious and part worldly—which misrepresents the gospel of Christ.

In his Parable of the Sower, the Savior speaks of a class of persons who fail to represent faithfully the heavenly character of his gospel, when he speaks of those who are "choked with the cares, riches, and pleasures of this life, and bring no fruit to perfection." These are a class in the Savior's description distinct from those who fail through error concerning Christian joy. They are, indeed, those who need more joy in the Holy Spirit. They are as a people walking through a dry and thirsty land, where no water is. They fail to use obvious means of divine grace, and the kingdom of grace becomes as a desert to their souls; the beauty of heavenly character fades; the strength of religious purpose decays.

There are a multitude of worldly cares, which need not crowd from the heart the blessings of the

gospel. The Son of God can walk upon the ruffled waters; the child of God may hear the voice of divine "good cheer" in the midst of a boisterous sea of temporal cares. If the Lord had not come to give us some religious care, would we not feel a burden of anxiety that no temporal busying could relieve? Better, then, to have some care for eternal things. Better for us to look out over our sea of cares, and see, and "be not afraid" of Him who comes to care for our souls.

The soul of an earnest man is often agitated in the search for religious truth which he would have to enter into his character for eternity. After the agitation of earnest seeking, the truth itself often comes to one's soul like a "still small voice" divine, that hushes his human cries. He recognizes it as a peaceful answer to his anxieties. It tells him at last that the soul which is capable of anxiety to know eternal, divine truth, may rise above all the power of temporal cares to spoil the immortal spirit.

Anxious care for one's own soul is not the care that makes shipwreck of one's faith in Christ. It is not, strictly speaking, one of the "cares of this world." It is commendable forethought of the world to come. It is a striving for mastery over merely worldly cares; a struggling to prevent their ingulfing the soul; a protest against being engrossed by the things which one, in some inferior measure, may care for in time.

There are "cares of this world" which do not interfere with the claims of Christ, while they afford the fairest field for the formation of the religious character, which, instead of dehumanizing the man, blends the Spirit of Christ with the instincts of better manhood.

Jesus, a guest at the wedding in Cana of Galilee—Jesus, the Son of God, the representative, the manifestation of God's good-will and pleasure concerning the children of men—stands at the threshold of human society on earth, the family, the "unit of society." He asks by his presence to sanctify the cares of the family; and in asking that, he asks to be a recognized, loved, and honored Divine presence in the various relations of earthly human society, with all their products of cares as well as of joys.

It was not necessary for one to forget Christ when he stood at the altar and vowed to care for one whom he loved with a love the fondest thrilling of which stirred no breath of jealousy in heaven. The care of a family forces upon him a multitude of anxieties. He may think that he could have been a better Christian without these anxieties. In such a case he is not the one to talk of manifesting sterling Christian qualities. Is it manly to say, "I could be a better Christian without my wife and children?" If he can make an offering of his life to Christ only on the hypothesis of a sacrifice of his family, his offering is an insult to the Savior, who

made a self-sacrifice for him. His fretfulness in such a case is pusillanimity.

The injunction to keep the heart with all diligence, does not exclude all care for the mental basis of the affections that are baptized with the Spirit of Christ. The gospel does not exhort us to neglect the foundation of intelligent love. A multitude of temporal ideas assert their right of place in the growing mind of a citizen of this lower world. Must he therefore ignore the message from heaven, and banish from his mind all care for the divine idea of eternal life? Why should not the divine idea glow in his mind? The heart need not go back and hide itself away from God because the intellect is going forward. The intellect may nurse its own peculiar cares, and perpetually change with its discoveries, while the renewed heart remains changeless in its devotion to the divine life revealed in Christ.

There have been skeptics who have made a lifelong effort to repudiate their early religious education, and to forget the impressions once made in the heart by the Son of God. They have been reluctant witnesses of the spiritual force of the divine life in Christ. They have failed to outlive that life, and have sometimes yielded at last, conquered by the divine love that would not give them up.

The real Christ is often crowded from the heart while one goes on in the lifeless performance of external duties enjoined by the letter of the gospel as

distinguished from the spirit. A ceremonial carefulness may go along with a spiritual carelessness. Men often give to the world their capacity for caring; and the world, in return, gives them care that interferes with their prospect of heaven, and cheats them with false representations of the value of their "means of grace;" for that is no means of grace, after all, which is used in such a way as to end in spiritual lifelessness.

If a man's soul is given over to the acquisition of worldly things that predominate and stamp their image in the mind, at the same time expelling the Christ-presence, he will either cease to be Christian by failing in every essential requirement of the Christian life, or he will attempt a compromise by some heartless performance of that class of nominal duties which interfere the least with the essentially worldly determination of his mind. He goes to church on Sunday; he lends his outward ear to the sermon; but his heart does not "hear what the Spirit saith." Though he has for years given his soul to the most sordid claims of the world, he can, perhaps, tell when he "gave his heart to the Lord;" but he does not tell how he has taken back the gift.

Intelligent faith in Christ sanctifies the necessary cares of the lower life; reveals their nobler meaning; assigns their limitations; makes them, in the case of a sincere Christian, consistent with the steady life he has in Christ. True, intelligent faith rebukes the cares that dispute with Christ. It is

not a spiritual legerdemain by which a predominantly worldly soul occasionally shuffles a heaven into view.

Cain, excusing his carelessness of his brother's blood, asked, "Am I my brother's keeper?" In modern times there are people willing to attend to the details of the business of their brethren as an excuse for neglecting their own business, to the injury of their own souls. They are willing to give their spiritual life in their care for the business of others, not as a matter of conscience, but as a matter of meddlesomeness. They waste their capital in a *busy-ness* (not to say business) that does not add to the nobility of their sympathy, and call it religious business. There are men and women in the Churches from whose minds nearly every sweet principle of the gospel has been expelled by a fussiness that degrades the dignity of the Christian character, and has long since overstepped the legitimate province of a Christian's wholesome influence in society.

Many men are now living in their narrow past, in which they lived too long with little thought of the future. Some lives are contracting, instead of expanding. Their horizon closes around a few habits, a few dogmatic opinions, a few selfish sympathies. We often see people whose lives are palpably contracting, ever and anon puffed up with "salvation." Christian salvation is not mere sentiment, that glows regardless of one's practice of Christian

virtues. The gospel of Christ is full of germs of religious truth which a man may take to his heart to the end that, with their growing in his spiritual nature, he may attain unto the religious largeness of soul contemplated by the great soul of the Redeemer.

The cares which are permitted to dwarf the soul are rebuked by the Great Savior, as well they may be, by Him who is in divine sympathy with that true greatness of soul which bears the stamp of his grace toward this fallen world. If a soul is filled with the cares of this world, it has, in that measure, failed in the Christian life. There have been, indeed, great souls that were careworn. Men have done noble Christian service for humanity, and have been patient and habitually cheerful, with no less daily cares than those which other men have permitted to dwarf their souls, and render them unproductive, save in fretfulness, in the midst of their petty cares.

The sanctification which the gospel proposes for man elevates the soul above earth, and is enlargement as well as purification of soul. The Lord Jesus Christ came to earth, not to save men in their littleness and to seal them in their littleness for heaven, but rather, by the inspiration of his great truths and the operation of his Spirit, to enlarge the souls of believing men. There is an earthliness of spirit that is littleness, that stunts the soul, and expels Christ's large thoughts; and

though formal praying, attending Church, taking the sacraments, learning the Creeds, go on, the man posssessed with a legion of cares may as well be possessed with a "legion of devils," so far as a large spiritual life is concerned.

All progress in the Christian life is frequently arrested, and all religious comfort is dissipated, by one's entanglement in his own web of unnecessary and unreal anxieties, which his imagination spins. What remedy can the gospel be for imaginary cares, if the mind persist in dwelling amidst fictitious anxieties? Must the Spirit of Christ be adjusted to unreal life? Does the Divine Spirit follow the bent of inclination of a hypochondriac, or of one who incessantly weaves the substance of his imagination into forms of unreasonable, unreal wants? Surely not. Such a one must sensibly clear the way for advancement in real Christian life; must employ all the natural sense he possesses in chasing away the bugbears of his imagination; must go back to real cares, and advance from them. He can never build a real, permanent character on fiction. He thinks the Lord should pass by matter-of-fact men, in their visible, tangible cares, to comfort him by special enactment. His progress in Christian life is arrested because he ceases to live within the sphere of Christian reality. His religious comfort is dissipated because he ceases to trust God in the real, necessary, inevitable cares of life,

and weaves a fabric of anxiety which appears substantial only in the eyes of his imagination.

Careworn and Christless—that tells the sad story of many a failure, after a fair start in the Christian life,—the pleasant flavor of the temporal life, and the inspiration of the divine, failing together; in many instances, inordinate anxiety about little things resulting in carelessness about great things; the mention of religion an occasion for an outburst of fretfulness, or of indignation, at the thought of adding Christ to the list of cares; the failure to comprehend the spirit of the gospel, designed to underlie—as the current of a life moving heavenward—all that the same God who gave us the gospel and our being in these circumstances, permits to attach to our individuality and to agitate our souls on earth.

XVIII.

RICHES.

THE gospel of the Lord Jesus Christ does not indiscriminately pronounce a benediction on shiftless poverty and a malediction on riches honestly accumulated and generously employed; but there are many who have much of this material world, and are slow to perceive that their life does not consist in the abundance of material things which they possess. Rich lives—lives of men, generous, spiritually-minded, exhibiting all Christian graces in the midst of steady and abundant worldly prosperity—are in demand to convince the querulous, who doubt that there can be any way of securing worldly comfort consistently with the spiritual blessings which the gospel proposes for men in this life.

There are those who started years ago to serve the Lord, who have prospered in the world, and failed in the gospel. They have frittered away their spiritual life in scraping together the things which are worth less than that life. They are victims of inordinate desire for mean things as compared with that which the Lord has to give the soul.

It is not possessing, but being possessed, by the

inordinate passion for wealth, that called forth the hard saying of Christ, "It is easier for a camel to go through the eye of a needle than for a rich man to enter the kingdom of God." Is he who said that to be regarded as a hard, implacable Master? Are we not rather to feel that here is one who thoroughly comprehends the right spirit of the kingdom of heaven? He shuts the door of heaven in the face of no man, poor in spirit, who yearns for a life richer in love and moral purity, and stronger in faith. He closes his gracious heart against no one who is not already satisfied with his possessions, and who has not given over his whole soul to material possessions.

A rich man's spiritual regeneration may be effected without his becoming poor, just as a poor man's regeneration may be effected without his becoming rich; yet poverty might test the rich man, and riches might test the poor man. There is a snare in riches; there is a snare in poverty. In either snare a man's spiritual life may be entangled and choked. Is a man possessed by the merely worldly idea of wealth? Does the idea roil him? Does he expect to get all things by his money? Does he care for but little, if anything, more than that which money gets? How can he sympathize with the heavenliness of the Lord Jesus Christ? How can he, without a reconstruction of ideas, enter Christ's kingdom? It is impossible except, as the Savior intimates, with divine help. Then if, with

divine help, he faithfully enters the Redeemer's kindgom, he is no longer the "rich man" of whom Christ speaks in the hard saying; for the Lord no more says "rich man" without discrimination than he says "poor man" without discrimination.

"Good Master, what shall I do to inherit eternal life?" The person who addressed this question to Christ was an honest Israelite, and a man of great wealth and influence. It is evident that this man expected the great Prophet to pass favorable judgment upon his character. Could he not stand a fair examination as to various points of social morality? Had he not kept these things from his youth up? He may not have been a man very liberal with his riches—not very generous; but he had not committed adultery; he had not murdered; he had not been a thief; he had not borne false witness; he had not dishonored his parents. Excellent negations for temporal society! But temporal society is not all; the question is concerning "eternal life." The real import of the man's question might be expressed thus: "What shall I do more to inherit eternal life? Can the good Master mean any more than I have done, any more than I am?" It was an instance of deep penetration of spirit and of life in the peculiar case of this man when Christ said to him: "Yet lackest thou one thing; sell all that thou hast, and distribute unto the poor, and thou shalt have treasure in heaven; and come, follow me." There is reason to believe that he was called

to be an apostle of the Son of God. If he had accepted the call, his name might have been associated for all time with the name of Paul. The Savior tested him in a peculiar manner. The test reveals the possibility of a religious failure at a critical moment, and how riches, not less than poverty—perhaps in many instances not more—may stand in the way of opportunity.

The gospel confronts on his own ground the rich man who is not spiritually-minded, who is heedless of opportunity for the advancement of his higher nature. The Christ is not to be blamed if fretful poor men, enviously thriftless men, shift the ground of complaint against rich men, and pour upon unoffending riches the animadversion which the gospel deservedly pronounces upon gross and obstinate unspirituality.

The Parable of the Sower is an illustrative prediction. It is true that Christ predicts that riches will expel from many a heart the seed of religious truth. The very quietness and brevity of the prediction in the parable indicate not the violence of gross wickedness so much as the gradual displacing (often in the process of growing rich) of that Divine Spirit which holds the mind in sympathy with heaven. It is not crime alone, not cruel inhumanity, that renders the soul unfit for the higher heavenly life. It is the abuse of this world that grieves the heart of Jesus. It is debasing poverty of soul that he sees; and, seeing that, and lament-

ing as the Son of God can lament, he reproves the man, poor with all his possessions, who might be "rich toward God" with more attention to God's wealth-giving Word.

Behold the Savior, "meek and lowly in heart," indignantly driving the traders from the holy temple. There they were converting God's house of prayer into a market-place, profiting by the sacrifices of religion. This Son of David rebukes the inordinate propensity of the children of Abraham, now dispersed among the Gentiles, given over to the bondage of bargaining. The Son of God could see in the merchants, buying and selling in the temple, the outcropping of peculiar Jewish degradation that was to sink the Jewish people below the horizon of that Messianic kingdom the spiritual glory and power of which the ancient prophets had foreseen and gladly declared. Alas! that God's peculiar people should go forth into the world and among the nations to offend by that abject spirit of bargaining which profanes the soul even as it profaned the temple of old!

Jesus, with his wonderful works, his wonderful doctrines, his transcendent life—pure, beautiful, and true—had made some impression for good on the character of Judas Iscariot; but Judas became a traitor to the kingdom of God notwithstanding that impression. He sold the Christ, and all of the Spirit of Christ that he had received vanished from his soul. When the Master refers to the fatal work of covetousness, we think of the fate of

Judas. We think it dangerous to dally with pieces of silver, with the thought of betraying the principles that are above and beyond all price. It is shameful for a follower of Christ to hesitate between money and the principles of the Christian religion.

The class of people under consideration started fair in Christian life. It was the genuine seed of Christ-truth that fell into their hearts. Noble purposes sprang up in their hearts. Their affections were transformed. They pleased their Christian friends with the rich promise of their religious profession. Modified views of this present world gave them less fiery expectation of the world's unspiritual gifts. They were less feverish in the mere love of money. Their thoughts of business and of a diligent man's share of the comfortable, the substantial, the beautiful, and the honorable in this world, were pleasantly mingled with thoughts of righteousness, peace, and joy in the kingdom of God. They have become sordid men of the world. The force of the evidence of the gospel's divine origin clings to them. They remain in the visible Church, because there clings to them a habit of thinking that somehow their relation to the Church will help them, or save them, in the absence of any spiritual life to comfort them. They can not at will fling off the authority of Christ, and they will not let go that hold upon the world which has soiled their souls. What shall they do? They

smile over the recollection of the fervency of their first love. They contend with their uncomfortable convictions, at times, and interject a plea concerning the crudeness of their first experience, and its inconsistency with their enlarged business. They strike out of their Creed their first interpretation of the Spirit of Christ, and adjust their interpretations to the requirements of men of very slight spiritual wants. They very adroitly turn their increase of knowledge to the increase of their material capital, and they make sure that their charity shall never exceed their income.

Did the poor of old gladly hear Jesus only because they were thriftless, fretting, idle paupers—men and women who had in them no elements of honorable worldly success? No. It is more than probable that poor, brave men, children of misfortune, whose very virtues in the circumstances in which they were placed kept them poor and prepared them the more readily to recognize Christ, were among the first to greet the glad tidings from Heaven. That the poor had the gospel preached unto them is evidence of Heaven's impartiality, rather than of Heaven's unjust discrimination between the rich and the poor.

There is nothing unworthy the promise of eternal life in the prophetic discernment of Christ as to the conduct of men in their effort to get rich. The ax is laid at the root of the tree. Shall the tree be cut down? What kind of fruit is it bear-

ing? Are gold and silver and bank-notes, representatives of earthly values, bound up with the fibers of a human heart? Are they in the way whenever the Lord, by his Spirit, would gently lead men into higher views and richer enjoyment of life? What if Christ means no more than a spiritual death proceeding from the non-use of the higher faculties of the soul, while the lower faculties are busy in making money only for money's sake? That is sufficiently significant. That is enough for the man who would be undeceived as to the quality of that eternal life which is to commence on earth, and move on with ever-growing and ever-glowing sympathy with the Spirit of the Son of God.

XIX.

PLEASURES AGAIN.

WE have considered the sinful pleasures that prevent the Christian life on earth; we have now to consider the pleasures — or the worldly methods of pleasure—that pervert the Christian life. The evil heart may effectually resist the gospel; the careless heart will lose the inspiration of the spirit of the gospel.

Our Savior, in referring to the pleasures of this life as working failure in the Christian life, did not therefore recommend the error of the ascetic. Asceticism is one extreme; intoxication by merely earthly pleasures is the other extreme. Both miss the heavenly mark which the Savior proposes for the aim and happiness of mankind.

Christianity, as well as philosophy, condemns what is irrational in amusement. Christianity is philosophy—the true love of the true wisdom, in time and in eternity. The healthy religious sentiment does not proclaim, "Work all the time;" neither does it approve of play that completely disqualifies the man for work. By just so much as genuine Christian sentiment gains the ascendency in a soul, does that soul regard with just suspicion whatever, in the name of amusement, tends to de-

press or degrade the vital Christian sentiment. The professed Christian who stands idly whittling a stick while he declares, for instance, that another engaged in a game of chess is essentially sinning, is not a faithful exponent of Christian philosophy. We would not trust the whittler to write out an exhaustive catalogue of sins of amusement; for he does not undertake to decide what is rational or irrational as a method of pleasure. He simply pronounces this or that amusement a sin, according to his whim.

The Christian religion denounces worldly methods of pleasure only in the measure of its self-defense. It pleads for its own life in the earth. If it is of God, it has the divine right to live in the life of humanity. The sincere, wise Christian is anxious only for what is essential to the Christian life and character in a soul. As a champion of Christianity, he will not be indiscriminately censorious. In many repects he will judge of amusements, as amusements, in the measure of their reasonable indulgence.

There are amusements that prevent the healthful play of vital Christian sentiments. We sometimes fondly imagine, in our play, that we are recreating our energies for better work, when, in fact, we are adding to the weights that oppress us and impede us in the glorious race for the heavenly life that is set before us. In our play, we enter into evil associations that are clogs to our spirits. Many a noble

Christian conscience is sullied, even as innocent little children's hands are soiled playing with blackened coals. We may make the distinction of the intrinsic and the extrinsic evil of the thing with which we play; but, after all, the important question is, Does the plaything disturb, does it soil, the vital religious sentiments which the gospel is designed to inspire in our souls—the sentiments which have given us sweeter pleasure, more real delight, than any temporal playthings? We would not have the stream to fail by being frittered away. We would not have the heavenward current of glorious religious sentiments driven back by a multitude of little aimless amusements. There is vigor in the play of wholesome Christian sentiments. Why ask, "What harm is there in dancing, what harm in horse-racing, what harm in this or that or anything" that mars the beauty or enervates the vigor of the Christian sentiments that enter into the spiritual character of a child of immortality?

There are worldly pleasures incompatible with a refined Christian taste. Questions of refined Christian taste are highly important; but they are not to be confounded with questions of conscience. Conscience has enough to do with attending to the questions that properly belong to it. A man thoroughly converted to the Lord Christ is translated into a new spiritual world wherein he sees, is touched by, and appreciates new spiritual beauty. A truly converted man is a man of renovated taste.

He is still a free man,—he knows it; he feels it; he appreciates it. He does not follow every incitement to giddy pleasure; for he abhors spiritual bondage. He will not be enslaved even by an innocent amusement. There is something here very different from what is commonly called conscientiousness; yet it is something that does not deserve a sneer. Delicacy of Christian taste deserves our admiration. Here is not a mere formal repudiation of this or that amusement, simply because one has made a formal profession of religion, and at the same time longs for forbidden fruit; but rather there is the manifestation of a purpose to avoid failure on the way, by doing no violence, even for the sake of transient pleasures, to the awakened taste for higher and nobler things that please the religiously reconstructed mind. Why may not one turn away from some amusements, not because he judges them sinful *per se*, but because they no longer please his mind? And may they not fail to please because the source of a higher pleasure has not failed in the man?

When the precious seed of Christ-truth has been sown in a heart, when one has made a promising profession of Christ, and when he has been a considerable time on the way, then failure in the character, which the Christ-truth is designed to impress in a soul, is all the more sad to the observer who appreciates the excellence of the pleasure which flows from the deep sources of the Christian char-

acter. It is a more striking failure than in the case of those who misapprehend the gospel, whose superficial joy is easily and rapidly dried up. A greater expectation is disappointed. One has been time enough on the way for Christian manhood to be developed; therefore we do not expect to see him hurting himself like a child at play. If his hand must be crippled, we would rather it were done through handling tools than through handling toys, which he should have outgrown. We expect in him a mind, through grace divine, tolerably well-balanced concerning worldly amusements.

We have seen men whose business was sedentary, sacrifice their physical health to too much amusement, which they named "exercise" or "recreation." We have seen men whose profession was Christian, sacrifice their spiritual health—sacrifice everything but the "profession"—all in the name of necessary amusement, that they might not give the world an impression of "sour godliness;" and they have succeeded by giving the world an impression of insipid godliness. We do not call that religious health which consists in dissipating all disposition for religious work.

If we look at it from a proper point of view, there is nothing ungracious in our Lord's rebuke of our excessive devotion to worldly amusement. It is, in fact, a deserved rebuke of our narrow view of amusement when there is not an equally cheerful view of duty—of what we owe to God and to

our higher nature. How freely we creatures talk about "liberal" views sometimes, when, in fact, our view is so narrow as to shut out God and duty!

The warning of the Savior is, that the Christian, starting out with high hope, may not fail on the way in the Christian character through too confident conformity with the amusements—that is, the methods of pleasure—of the exclusively worldly character.

Jesus Christ looked with unclouded vision into an open heaven; therefore our faith is in One whom we believe to have seen into heaven, who divinely knows whereof he speaks. He speaks with the spiritual authority of conscious oneness with God. The Divine One blesses the man who has not seen, but believes that Jesus saw more than the science of earth reveals. It is not a slight question in the mind of the sincere believer, "What may or may not interfere with my soul's following the heavenly vision of the Son of God?" Shall the inferior pleasure be permitted to obscure the soul's vision of the superior? Shall the less good take precedence of the greater? Of what use is it to attempt to be a Christian at all, if not to be an earnest one? And how can one be an earnest Christian without having some view of heaven eye to eye with Christ—a view of heaven that convinces him that this life is a preparation, and not an uninterrupted play?

We believe in real playing; we believe also in real praying. We deprecate the praying that loads the conscience with a constant dread of amusement; we deprecate the playing that fills the heart with a distaste, a dread of praying, and renders praying a farce by making it to appear solely in the light of a ceremonial performance, a dull formality, manifesting no steady desire for the life, light, joy, and purity of heaven.

The Christ-truth is designed to give moral dignity to human character and life. The man who heeds the suggestion of the Son of God must cherish some patient thinking with reference to the quality and measure of the pleasures of this life. He shall not be in bondage. He shall have free exaltation of character. He shall find that as he becomes a man in Christ he will "put away childish things." We find no contradiction in the humility which Jesus inculcates and the dignity of character and life to which they aspire who repeatedly engage in acts of worship in the spirit of the Lord Jesus Christ. The quality of some pleasures, and the excessive measure of others, interfere with the modest dignity that he is to maintain who accepts, in his inmost soul, the Christian theory of redeemed manhood.

It is not for us dogmatically to decide what shall be the specific interludes of a life of devotion to the religion of Christ. We may leave to each the songs that please him best. The danger of

losing Christ's truth as a rule of life lies in a general erroneous view of earthly pleasures, rather than in specific amusements. A condemnation of "innocent pleasures" is not intended, nor implied, when we point out the injury done in that name to positive Christian character. Look through even the innocent amusements of a soul, what do you ultimately find? Character that can pass through fire? Substance? Charity that has weight? Resources of heavenly enjoyment? What if all these qualities have failed? Now, there are souls on earth that will reveal all these positive qualities. Their amusements are transparent. The outlines of substantial Christian character appear all the more clearly through the pure surrounding atmosphere of their recreating amusements. They indicate at play how they have been at work. They glorify the earthly sources of pleasure which the Lord has given them. They give a charm to the very amusements which empty idlers invest with nothingness. Looking again through the amusements (innocent *per se*) of a soul, what do you ultimately find? No substance; no heroic character; no grave charity; no vigorous spring of heavenly enjoyment. The poise of Christian character is overthrown. We have an illustration of Christ's prediction: "Choked with the pleasures of this life, and bringing no fruit to perfection."

XX.

UNRIPE FRUIT.

IN a just view of the Christian religion, "the cares, riches, and pleasures of this life" are reprehended only as they lead to failure in the production of ripe fruit—mature Christian character. In the Parable of the Sower the Lord Jesus Christ speaks with no uncertain accent when he describes certain persons as bringing "no fruit to perfection," or maturity. They are a particular class of persons. Not those whose evil hearts have directly and maliciously designed to resist the truth; not those whose shallow hearts have misapprehended and almost immediately lost the truth,—but those who may be said to have failed on the way to maturity of the Christian character proposed by the truth of Christ, implying a somewhat prolonged but irregular and deficient effort.

We have seen unripe fruit hanging on a tree, undergoing two entirely dissimilar processes. The one was a process of going on to maturity; the other was a process of decaying from the point of arrested growth. We have seen something analogous to this in the fruit of the gospel in the lives of its professors. Then, we have seen instances of human imperfection not altogether inconsistent

with a maturity of Christian love, that made our hearts glad.

The same apology can not be made for immaturity of the most obvious Christian graces and virtues as for human imperfection. There is in Christianity the constant assumption of the imperfection of man. The gospel proposes a right spirit for man—proposes to cover man's weakness with the mantle of divine charity. The law of love demands ripeness. The heart is to be made fruitful. The fruit of the heart is to give evidence of religious culture. We do not refer just here to the unripe fruit that proceeds from the bud—or, defective judgment—but to the unripe fruit that proceeds from the heart that has not at least the judgment's good intention. The "pure heart," in its earthly stage of purity, does not imply the perfect, the flawless judgment. Many a holy intention has ended in a mistake.

There is a ripeness in advanced life distinct from the unripeness of recent converts. You have seen buds of rich promise opening in many a revival-field. The fragrance of blossoming graces has cheered your heart. Your soul drank in the sweetness of the springtime of God's love in the heart of a religiously awakened community. You were not surprised that planting should differ from harvest. The innocent mistakes of young graces were as pleasant as children's play. The minifying of the world, before a just comprehension of the

magnitude of duties to be performed in the world, was not disagreeable. The abandon of young joy created no disgust in your mind. The misapplication of faith to remove difficulties with which faith had no legitimate business was not unexpected. The young missionary spirit, pouncing on old heathens at home, was not regarded as a serious blunder. Happy, enthusiastic converts to the spirit of the gospel of the Lord Christ! Heaven appeared so near that earth seemed almost an unreality; and they were scarcely patient, at first, to plant in the earth at their feet the seeds of practical duties, to spring up along their pathway.

There are certain erroneous views of "death-bed repentance" which sadly interfere with right views of ripe fruit of Christian living. It is only in peculiar and exceptional circumstances of the last sickness that *initial* preparation then, for heaven, can be supposed most reasonable and seasonable. It is an abnormal preparation that is then made. The normal preparation is earlier, so that there may be time and room for the growth of fruit of Christian life on earth. It is true that there are circumstances which shed luster on the lingering mercy and spiritually saving grace of God. Sometimes, in dying, the real life of the soul begins; but it is well for each one to assume that *he* is not an exception to the general rule of the gospel that a genuine and most hopeful Christian life is to begin and grow and mature on earth. A deliberate

calculation that his case is an exception vitiates his expectation.

Many of the Christian profession lay scarcely any restraint on the baser passions and grosser appetites. Herein is an illustration of a vicious theory of salvation. The Christ-truth is not unerringly realized in the life the moment it is perceived by the mind. Grossness of appetite, unrestrained animality, are not sanctified by glimpses of the beauty of holiness which even aspiring spirituality may catch from time to time. Revivals of religion are often misinterpreted because straggling rays of the bright beauty of holiness, received in the pauses of unholy passions and of excessive worldliness, have been mistakenly regarded as pledges of salvation. There is a false view of salvation that imposes no habitual restraint upon the lawlessness of the fallen man. Fallen man must rise to a just expectation of heavenly joy and peace. His salvation must be a religious matter-of-fact. The transient rays of divine beauty that touch the lingering spiritual perception of the man-animal are to be supplemented by the full blaze, the steady illumination, the warming influence, the developed fruitfulness, of the Sun of righteousness.

Let us now examine certain distinct characteristics of unripeness in the practice of professed Christians.

There are unripe Christians like unripe sour

fruit. Can a man in some way receive the Christ-truth, and weave it into a creed or a theory of salvation, notwithstanding unmistakable and habitual acidity of heart? This man need not be confounded with the ripe Christian whose mild tartness flavors his ripeness. There is an unmitigated sourness of unripeness—sour grapes that set one's teeth on edge. The affections, which Christ designed to be kept sweet, are not to be as steeped in vinegar. There are professed Christians whose kindness has the sharp flavor of reluctant duty. You never think of them as adopting the sentiment of the psalmist: "How sweet are thy words unto my taste; yea, sweeter than honey to my mouth." Their animal spirits appear to have turned sour.

Much that is radically disagreeable in the disposition or temper of men has been wrongly attributed to what some regard as the essentially impracticable spirituality of the gospel. There are men who regard sour Christians as the real exponents of the gospel; real exponents, but not agreeable characters; ripe fruit of prime error, instead of the unripe fruit of the seed sown for the production of ripe, holy, and sweet affections.

The error of the sour Christian consists in the unnatural process which he forces the Christ-truth to undergo in his heart. He misapplies this truth; gets its wrong meaning; misses its sweet significance; places so little check on his bad affections

that his religious affections become perverted; uses the Christ-truth in such a way that he gets a character which is neither worldly nor heavenly, but is a specimen of sour unripeness—with no prospect of maturity—in the field of the Redeemer.

There are unripe Christians like unripe, tasteless fruit. The tasteless Christian is a disappointment to the person of religious taste. Where is the richness of the ripe grapes on the branches of the vine? Does nothing remain but religious insipidity after the shell of one's Christian profession is penetrated? What remains in the likeness of a spiritual Christ, what that reminds of "generous fruits that never fail, on trees immortal growing?"

It is not the violence done to literary taste, but that done to refined Christian taste, which often convinces us that Christ's truth has been abused. Christian taste is that matured by communion with the divinely-loving spirit of Christ. The insipid Christian is he—whatever his profession, however rich his earthly pleasures, however great and varied his worldly possessions, however dignified his cares—who fails to evince that within him is the Spiritual Christ, the source of sentiments worthy his immortality.

There are unripe Christians like unripe withered fruit. When we say "backsliders," we do not keep so prominently in view the idea of fruitlessness, conveyed in the Savior's talk about the seed

of vital truth sown in the heart and bringing forth no fruit to perfection. The reverses of fortune of men, in the matter of wealth, health, social position, and intellectual force, reveal men who have shrunk into narrower limits of natural life. We see them but shadows of their former selves. We see the man of great wealth stricken with hopeless poverty. He no longer has any nerve for speculation. The whole life has shrunk with the collapse of worldly possessions. We see the man of buoyant health and abundant flow of animal spirits stricken with hopeless disease. His soul is in bondage to his emaciated body. He becomes a smaller man in all his hopes and plans. We see the honorable reputation of a man of great social influence blasted. He whom the noble delighted to honor becomes but a dainty morsel for paltry knaves. We see the man of mighty intellect yielding to insanity, and becoming weaker than the little but expanding mind of a child. There are, likewise, specimens of withered Christians on earth. They are shrunken from what they once were in Christ. There is no longer any grand proportion of Christian graces in their lives. They are loosely attached to the Church. They are spiritless, just as the withered fruit of a tree is juiceless.

There are unripe Christians like unripe, good-for-nothing fruit. It is said of some green fruit plucked from the tree that it is good for nothing. Let the fruit remain on the tree, and it is at least

good for growing—good for ripening. There are some nominal Christians who are not even good for growing, nor for ripening; and, being unfit for that, their uselessness is best described as good-for-nothingness.

There is no place for zeroes in the kingdom of Christ. Each man must be a significant figure, or nothing, in fact. He must count at least *one*, to be added up in the column of units. The Lord may make some use—beyond our present comprehension—of those whom society designates as utterly worthless characters; but Christian society may well continue its designation in the case of the class of people who exhibit no responsible usefulness—who are good for nothing in the sphere of a good will's activity.

The gospel of Christ is misrepresented by the characters indicated by its Author, when he said: "Some [seed of Christ-truth] fell among thorns; and the thorns sprang up with it, and choked it. . . . That which fell among thorns are they, which, when they have heard, go forth, and are choked with cares and riches and pleasures of this life, and bring no fruit to perfection." The Lord Jesus Christ can be better represented in human life on earth, notwithstanding the variety of human infirmities, the obstructions to the vision of faith, the disorder of society, and the possessions, the

cares, and the pleasures of a temporal world. The human heart can be educated for a world and a society of higher order. There is a glorious blessedness for them who hunger and thirst after righteousness, for they shall be satisfied.

We turn, with a feeling of blessed relief, to a view of the *gospel of Christ, accepted and kept in good and honest hearts, who bring forth fruit with patience.*

XXI.

THE CHRIST-TRUTH ACCEPTED WITH HONEST CONVICTIONS.

THE human race has sinned. The blood of mankind is corrupted. That all men have inherited the taint of the moral corruption of a primitive man is the testimony of the suffering heart of the race of man. Transmitted suffering and transmitted enjoyment alike declare that the human race is a unit; that there is what has been termed the solidarity of the race of man. It costs us something to be men, to be of man.

There is a sinfulness spread out over the whole race. The lines of the generations are diverging as we look a few generations onward; but as we look many generations backward, these lines converge toward a primitive man. There is a break in the records of history; then Moses gives us a chapter of the history of a primal fall—a history gathered from the material of tradition. God providentially gives the chapter the seal of divine authority. The Bible states a fact which appears as a fact in every point of view of man's experience of sin. Herein is the ground of a conviction opening the way for a new life in sympathy with the manifested life of Jesus Christ. Is there an individual so far removed

from the fact of sinfulness that there is in him no ground of personal conviction? Can he say to all other men, without fear of contradiction or condemnation, "Which of you convinceth me of sin?" Can his conscience unfalteringly pronounce himself holy while ignoring the Christ?

Mark that trembling jailer at Philippi, in the presence of the apostles of Christ? True, he was frightened by a mighty earthquake. He was unnerved, and his mind so distracted that he came near taking his life with his own hands. But now the danger is over. His prisoners evidently have no intention of trying to escape. The jailer does not tremble for fear of the penalty of permitting the escape of his prisoners. "Sirs," he asks, "what must I do to be saved?" This man had listened during the night to the religious devotions of these heroic Christians in bonds. It is a reasonable supposition that, during the previous day, he had been pondering in his mind the message of Christ. He had trembled under the ministry of pressing physical danger. He is now separated from all the world by a sentiment of personal sinfulness; and the salvation he inquires about is salvation from sin.

The jailer's inquiry begins with himself, a conscious sinner. Now, a man of to-day makes no more honest beginning, who seriously repeats the jailer's inquiry, while death does not immediately stare him in the face, while heathen superstitions do not excessively alarm him, while he has some deeper in-

sight into the origin of evil, while his intellect takes a broader survey of salvation, while his emotions are under firmer control.

There would be no self-conviction in a human soul if the Holy Spirit were not moving in the bosom of humanity. The self-consciousness of guilty man is divinely assisted. His sleep in sin is sometimes disturbed by the Spirit of God. His conscience is illumined. The voice divine saying, "You have sinned," is distinctly another than the voice of one saying to himself, "I have sinned;" but that self-conviction is never uttered within the total darkness of a sinful nature; there is a "dim religious light" struggling through the stained soul wherein the Holy Spirit seeks a sanctuary. The Divine One pauses at the threshold of the soul's liberty. He does not force an entrance. Liberty is sacred, even in the view of God. The fullness of the light of the Divine Presence is not in that soul which withholds its consent.

A man honestly confesses that he is just such a sinner as the gospel of Christ describes. It is a confession of specific conviction, the point or edge of which is not blunted, but is as the sharp sword of the Spirit of God.

In honest conviction there is recognition of the holiness of God. The sincere reader of the Bible receives an impression of an immaculate character. This character is divine. The Holy One rises sublimely above the darkest phases of the history

of the Israelites, the nation chosen to exhibit in many respects, by striking contrast, the glory of the God of nations. God's holiness is declared by the very "hidings of his face," as when he says: "Your iniquities have separated between you and your God, and your sins have hid his face from you." Heartfelt conviction of sin and honest self-reproach are the very beginning of a true conception of the divine holiness. The majesty of moral purity appears. Human self-condemnation vindicates the Holy One, whose ways are not as the ways of men.

The life and character of Jesus Christ are the true expression of the will of God concerning the life and character of men. No purity of lifeless things in the temple at Jerusalem, no whiteness of priestly robes, no lamb even without blemish, no rigid separating of things clean and unclean, has so vividly expressed the idea of holiness—has so declared the Divine Father. Christ is the Word of God—the revealing Word; and "the Word was made flesh, and dwelt among us (and we beheld his glory, the glory as of the only begotten of the Father) full of grace and truth." "In him was life; and the life was the light of men." It is in receiving this light within the darkness of the soul that is equivalent to a conviction, in some degree, of personal sinfulness. Unlike Christ, unlike God—is not this conviction of sin formulated?

There are diversified phenomena of conviction of

sin, yet all consistent with the one phase of honesty of self-condemnation.

A child, in a childish way, feels an inherited disposition of soul as wrong in the sight of God. The child is the man in miniature, notwithstanding it can not trace the *rationale* of the spiritual corruption of the human race. By just so much as a child can realize itself as in the wrong, it can embrace the Christian religion as adjusted to the mind of childhood, and exemplify the wisdom and grace of Jesus, who said: "Suffer little children, and forbid them not, to come unto me." The same Divine Spirit that will not crush natural or instinctive virtues, will not spurn the convictions of the heart of childhood. The same spirit in the grown-up man that is delighted with the natural virtues that are discoverable in the worst child, will not be displeased with the self-reproaches of that child coming within the sphere of influences of the religion of Jesus. Once admit that this religion is of God, and it irresistibly follows that it is for men, and the children of men; and if aught of sin is bound up in the heart of a child, the Spirit of God will not withhold the light in which self-condemnation is made.

A very ignorant man, with a childlike faith in God, sees that all his life has gone wrong. The taint of sin within him has at last become offensive to himself. He is not one to grapple with the problem of evil; it is too intricate for him. He

does not call evil good; he condemns himself for so long neglecting the good within his reach, and for cherishing evil in his heart. Men of the world smile at what was gracefulness in this man's childhood, now become awkwardness in the throes of conviction; but, after all, there remains the simplicity of honesty to be admired. He needs not to see all the length and breadth of divine truth, all the grandeur of heaven, all the problem of divine government, in order to detect and to condemn evil in his own heart, and to realize that his self-condemnation in some measure coincides with Divine disapprobation. If in this matter he go somewhat too far, it is not so great an evil as not to go far enough.

A grossly wicked man experiences a sudden check in the smooth current of his self-esteem. He honestly questions the habitually favorable judgment he has passed upon his own character, in violent opposition to Christ. This is not simply a case of violent alarm in the midst of indefinable terrors of God's law; it is a case of simple honesty with one's self. The very violence of a lawless life affords an opportunity for unmistakable self-condemnation. The Christ-truth is a standard by which this man measures himself. He compares the facts of his own bad life with the plain traits of the character of a good man, and declares to himself that he is not what he ought to be.

It is a hopeful sign of reformation for a really

and unmistakably bad man unequivocally and literally to say so. True, he may never become, on earth, the finest character that Christianity can produce; but he is honest in one particular, without which general dishonesty is utterly hopeless.

The grossly wicked man certainly can never become a good man without some definite conviction of sin, any more than a grossly ignorant man can become a knowing man without some conviction of ignorance.

The sudden reformation of many a decidedly bad man has surprised us, and has appeared more like a fact of supernaturalism than it really is, because we are so slow to believe in the possibility of honest convictions in the lowest degradation of the human heart. We often expect the Almighty to make bare his arm where divine influences are simply making bare the heart of a man who condemns himself in the light of Christ.

The man of richly cultivated mind is not necessarily, on that account, less the subject of the tone of conviction of sinfulness which agrees with the solemn charge of sinfulness conveyed in the evangelical Scriptures.

The literary taste and culture which are accompanying the Spirit of Christ in our age sometimes attempt to deny the bitter germ of sinfulness in the heart of humanity. The sins of genius often find more favor than the convictions that will not be hushed by the smooth accents of genius; and

self-condemnation, in accordance with the spirit of the gospel of Christ, is often regarded as almost an unpardonable offense of the literary character.

A cultured man becomes distinctly conscious of wrong affections, and honestly condemns himself. His conviction as to what is radically wrong in his heart does not interfere with his literary taste. He is not offended with the literary diction of the evangelists. He may divest the gospel of circumstances of time and place; yet the Holy Spirit and the heart of Jesus touch him in the depths of his human nature much the same as they touch any other sinful man.

The mind which has been educated without reference to the moral or religious principles of Christianity can not begin to accept the Christ-truth as a rule of life without a definite conviction of sinfulness, answering to the tone of Christ's denunciation of whatever is opposed to the spiritual kingdom which the Christ proclaims as divine.

We may well pause before we question the social honesty of many a man who indignantly repels the charge of flagrant sin against humanity while he is convicted of sin in the presence of God. The humane side of Christianity, almost unconsciously, in no small degree he may have accepted. Wherever there is any lack of spiritual integrity there is room for that peculiar conviction of sin which is implied in the very promulgation of the gospel of Christ. The broken spirit of a man is to be made whole.

Not alone the heart of the grossest sinner—of him who violates the plainest dictates of humanity, who exhibits the least and the fewest traits of natural goodness—is to be searched; there is a beauty of conviction that shines through the spirit of him who, in the light of the Divine Presence, condemns himself while men praise him.

Such a man, with uncovered heart and humble spirit, stands not far from that spiritual kingdom, the glory of which shines clearer and clearer unto the day of his complete acceptance.

XXII.

THE CHRIST-TRUTH ACCEPTED WITH HONEST REPENTANCE.

THE preaching of John the Baptist, with the beginning of the ministry of Jesus, is like the opening of a mighty poem, an epic of a race redeemed from the bondage of sin, struggling through centuries into light, life, and liberty: "Repent ye; for the kingdom of heaven is at hand. . . . Prepare ye the way of the Lord; make his paths straight."

The sermons of John and Jesus were in keeping with the state of society, the requirements of a spiritual reformation, the inauguration of a divine religion, the divine purpose to set up on earth a heavenly kingdom designed to transform the heart of humanity.

The gospel of Christ is consistent throughout. If John was truly the herald of the coming Lord; if the day of Immanuel was at hand; if the life of men here below was to exhibit a more heavenly phase; and if men's lives had become notoriously bad,—then no more fitting theme than repentance could have engaged the soul of the herald and the Savior.

John preached repentance—the lifting up of sor-

row for sin into a higher sphere than that of regret for the temporal inconveniences of a disorderly life — elevating sorrow into the solemn presence of God, joining to it sincere confession of sinfulness, and a reformation preparatory to the spiritually regenerating influences of the Divine Spirit.

There was to be more than conviction of sin; there was to be sentiment, and action, and suspension of bad habits—"fruit meet for repentance;" all appropriate to an honest desire to enter into spiritual life.

To feel sorry for sin, as transgression of the law of God, is the very essence of that repentance preached by the Son of God. To act as moved by such a sorrow, is the very essence of that honesty which is accepted in the sight of God. To constitute Christian repentance there must follow, upon some degree of conviction of sinfulness, a corresponding degree of godly sorrow, a holy purpose, a pure desire, and a practical effort.

Sorrow arising from conviction of personal sinfulness has ranged from the tenderest and most touching regret to the deepest and most violent anguish. There is a tendency in the mind of each man to fix a technical degree of penitential sorrow corresponding to that which characterized a spiritual revolution in his own life. It is often forgotten that there are ever-varying phases of conviction of sinfulness, and that the main consideration should be such a degree of regret in the soul of the indi-

vidual who is convicted of sin against God as will urge him to attain by the grace of God unto a better life.

If we conceive of a condition of society on earth in which, for successive generations, all the children of men are faithfully taught by vitally Christian parents concerning the Christian life, we can still conceive of convictions of the want of an intense religious experience preceding spiritual regeneration. A tenderer sorrow for sinfulness might well move the hearts of men, of no very vicious character, on the way to a correspondingly loftier holiness, and religious energy of conduct. But such a condition of society is not in our day. We see moral corruption rather than Christian virtue transmitted from parents to children; and we shall continue to witness, if the world become not utterly godless, the diversified phenomena of godly sorrow for sin.

Intense fear has often been mistaken for holy regret, while many an honest repentance toward God, when fear has been held in abeyance, has been regarded as nothing more than religious terror. A sorrow refined by the presence of the Holy Spirit, springing from the depths of a resistless conviction of sinfulness, and the deep consciousness of want of Christ-life, with honest approval of such life, is misinterpreted by the soul which only fear can move, and which regards the fact of human sinfulness as nothing for personal anxiety.

It is indeed the voice of divine command that we hear saying, "Repent ye;" but there is a volume of meaning in the voice. It is a note of preparation for the gifts of the Divine Spirit. It is a proclamation of the Great King concerning what ought to be. It is a command that leaves somewhat of spontaneity to the godly sorrow of the man who, in the light of the Holy Spirit and of the law, contemplates his sinfulness and condemns himself.

There is a sorrow for sin responsive to the suffering of Him who grieved on Calvary for the sin of humanity:

> "From Calvary a cry was heard—
> A bitter and heart-rending cry;
> My Savior! every mournful word
> Bespeaks thy soul's deep agony."

Surely, on that cross a sinless One was making a sacrifice for sin. The tragedy on Calvary might well move the heart of a man, convinced of the fact of his personal sinfulness, with painful regret and an unutterable yearning for some experience of personal reconciliation with God.

A holy purpose is born in the sorrow of a just conception of the sinfulness of sin. An honest repentance can not be aimless—can not be like the fluttering of a wounded bird, and no more.

The repentance that Christ preaches has in it a definite purpose of Christian life. The Savior does not attach a simple, unalterable value to sorrow, as if tears alone were to pass current in a bargain for

salvation. Christ preaches a repentance that contains a Christian purpose.

Those Jews who sincerely repented under the preaching of John the Baptist, signalized a purpose to receive the message of Him whom John preached—the Messiah—who was to come and establish a spiritual kingdom. Well might John sternly rebuke those Pharisees who came to his baptism with hypocritical intention, who evinced no purpose nor desire for spiritual reformation. But among the people who received the "baptism of repentance" were some whose souls were thirsting for life, who were going forth to meet the Christ.

We estimate the value of repentance under the gospel of Christ not so much by the measure of pain of soul—for men live under various degrees of consciousness of depravity—as by the purpose of life that is evolved from whatever sorrow for sin, as sin, a soul may experience. There can be no attaining unto the Christian life by ignoring the fact of sin, and there can be no hopeful sorrow for sin that does not give birth to a holy purpose.

Repentance under the gospel is the soul's turning heavenward. It is therefore not an aimless alarm of soul. A man convinced that the course of his life is radically wrong, purposes, by the grace of God, to amend his life, and to seek spiritual salvation. Having yielded to a definite con-

viction of sinfulness, he can not consistently nor honestly fail to cherish in his heart a purpose to attain unto Christian holiness.

No man is honestly penitent, according to the design of Christ, who has not in his soul a distinct purpose to reform his life. A superficial social morality can not take the place of a profound spirituality. There are thousands in the present stage of Christian morality in our land who may well contemplate and purpose a spiritual reformation that shall search the profoundest resources of the heart of Jesus.

The repentance which Christ preached at the beginning of his ministry may be considered, in an important sense, as the beginning of a Christian life. It contains certain elements of such a life. It is the awakening of sentiments appropriate to the religious life of a Christian. A penitent spirit is already within the sphere of the spirit of the gospel. It has entered a region of religious sentiment with desire to go farther. Though practical reformation seem almost hopeless; though the darkest clouds float over the soul; though innumerable difficulties perplex the mind; though faith long falter,—yet may desire, kept alive, make an opening in the clouds that surround the throne of God; for in the light of that desire, awakened by the call of the Son of God, is salvation defined.

The words of the Savior, saying, "Blessed are they that hunger and thirst after righteousness,"

answer to "the voice of one crying in the wilderness, Repent ye." The repentance that Christ preaches is both a sorrow and a beatitude. There is a mourning that is intimately blended with hungering after righteousness. The words of blessedness that Jesus uttered in the memorable Sermon on the Mount are divine responses to the pleading of desire in hearts wounded by sin.

A heart simply penitent can be said to be "good and honest"—in the words of our Lord's Parable of the Sower—for the simple reason that a penitent heart is in a condition good for the end proposed by the Christian religion. The soil is prepared for the seed of Christ-truth. The heart is in condition to appreciate the vital principles of Christianity. The hungering of the heart in a measure determines the salvation to be attained. Skepticism is baffled by the heart's satisfaction. Christianity meets the want of the soul that is truly penitent.

The grand argument for the Christian religion is the argument for holiness of heart and life; an argument that may be appreciated in the measure of a sinful man's desire to be delivered from the bondage of sin, and to reach finally a sinless state—a heaven—the heaven of Jesus the Christ of God.

If we regard the circumstances of the beginning of the ministry of Christ and of John the Baptist; if we think of the calm and holy spiritual

kingdom that was soon to appeal to the hearts of men; if we contemplate the moral condition of men soon to be wooed and won by the Divine Spirit, we can conceive a practical view of the repentance required, and see how sinful habits, in some practical measure, were to be suspended as a pledge of honest repentance. The bad habits of thought and of conduct, contracted through many years of neglect of the higher life, may not be corrected in a day; but an effort to control these habits is certainly made by an honest penitent. The conscious effort is the beginning of his regeneration. A cry for God is evolved from the depths of his heroic struggle. His need of Divine help becomes all the more apparent to him in the effort that he makes. The effort reveals the magnitude of his undertaking.

It is the initial practical effort that is made which prevents the unfounded expectation of a mystic regeneration so often indulged by idle souls hungering for cheap glorification. The effort made under the conditions of honest repentance indicates, in some measure, the necessary spiritual transformation. The effort, trembling on the verge of failure, is, in effect, a confession of weakness, and pleads for Christ.

The penitent does not seek in his effort a justification of his past life, either of grossest viciousness or of mere irreligiousness. There is a conviction of sinfulness that can not, in any case, ignore

a sinner's need of the mercy of God. The honest penitent's idea of forgiveness must be pure and simple; but the purpose of a Christian life can hardly be cherished in a soul that has not already made some initial practical effort consistent with regret for the past and hope for the future.

There are immediate fruits of repentance that clearly show forth a soul's desire for a deeper spiritual regeneration that exhibits to the inmost consciousness the fruit of the Spirit of God. If repentance itself be regarded in some sense a conversion of the spirit of a man—a radical change of religious intention—still it is but a change of sorrow, of desire, of purpose, and of effort, preparatory to a deeper, a mightier, a life-inspiring conversion, that may as well be termed a regeneration, a being born of the Spirit of God. Many a palpable reformation fails to be the regeneration comprehended in the declaration of Christ, "Ye must be born again."

What, then, are the fruits of that repentance comprehended by the preaching of John, the herald of the spiritual kingdom of the Divine Redeemer? There must be more than the life of an ordinary, impenitent sinner. There ought not to be less than the religious life that is in complete and vital sympathy with the Son of God, the Savior of men.

XXIII.

THE CHRIST-TRUTH ACCEPTED WITH HONEST CONVERSION.

WHAT is Christian conversion? Such is the question coldly and repeatedly asked by many who acknowledge no definite conviction of sinfulness, and manifest no sincere repentance. No attempt is here made to answer such a question so as to satisfy the mind that realizes no spiritual want.

It is sufficient for the present purpose to indicate that there is a Divine process by which a soul already convicted of sin, according to the Divine Spirit of the gospel of the Lord Jesus Christ, is led into a state of sympathy with the heart of Jesus, and into a state of communion with the Holy Spirit. We have no controversy just now with the skepticism that yields to no conviction of sinfulness, and steels the heart against repentance.

There is a repentance which is, in a degree, a state of belief in the gospel of Christ. It is, with conviction of sinfulness, the beginning of the process of Christian conversion. We make no inquiry just here concerning the sources of one's belief that God addresses men through the records of the life, doctrines, and death of Jesus. We recognize his belief as a simple matter of fact; there is no question of

the man's belief. In this world we see men believing in various systems of temporal belief; we see them acting on this phase of belief. We see men changed by the spirit and into the spirit that animates their system of belief. We see a variety of currents of temporal human life. In this way of seeing, we do not degrade the claims of the gospel; we rejoice in the phenomena of Christian belief; we indicate a conversion of the soul, consistent with sincere, earnest belief in the gospel as divine.

Christian repentance is one phase of belief in Christ approaching genuine life in Christ. In repentance, we see belief generating sorrow, purpose, and effort. In repentance is belief in earnest indeed, but not in peaceful rest. The current of life is changed in repentance, it is true, but not yet settled. Yet the penitent soul is in a state of preparation to exercise trust in God.

When we read in the Word of God that "without faith it is impossible to please Him," we infer that the reverse of this statement gives the simplest and correct intimation of Christian experience—with faith or trust, it is possible to please God. It is possible, too, for one to have the testimony in his soul that he pleases God—a persuasion of his mind intimately blended with his consciousness of trusting.

This trust, illustrated in various ways in the gospel, is all that we may offer of intrinsic value to God. It is of the nature of a gift to God. It is the real bond of our soul's communion with God.

It is a first principle of religious life. How can anything else than trust serve as the bond of an everlasting union of the Divine and the human? Has not God created the soul of a human creature to trust the Creator?

To trust in God—is it not a spiritual possibility slumbering in a human soul? Is not Christ appointed to awake the dormant faculty of the soul, to educate it, to direct it, to be the medium of its happily reaching the bosom of the Father? What can be substituted for this trust? Penitential tears express a man's lack of trust in himself, his self-reproach for his weakness, the acknowledgment of his demerit. The purpose perfectly to obey the divine law, is not by any means the consummation of perfect obedience; difficulties rise like mountains in advance of such a purpose. A general belief of the gospel, based on the evidence of its divine authority, does not satisfy the heart hungering for righteousness. A penitent soul already has the general belief; but it is not sufficient for Christian life. A conversion of the soul, involving specific, vital trust, is necessary in the very nature of the Christian life.

Though it were true that God has already forgiven the sins of every sinner on earth, trust alone could realize it and make the persuasion in the mind of Divine forgiveness the beginning of the real Christian life. Every life would continue to be godless without this specific trust. Eternity would

not be sufficient for the growth of holiness without this trust. Communion with the Divine Spirit would be impossible without this trust. We meddle not here with what passes in the Infinite Mind; yet we believe that the Word of God encourages a penitent soul unfalteringly to trust God for the forgiveness of sins. The penitent is encouraged to believe his sins forgiven, and in the course of a religious life to act as one so believing, and to have the joy and the peace of trust.

The clear, full assurance of faith, the sweet, pure persuasion in the soul of Divine forgiveness of sin, with will invigorated to do God's will, joined with renovated affections, the chief of which is the love of God "shed abroad in the heart by the Holy Spirit," is Christian conversion.

What is the significance of the life and the death of Jesus Christ regarded in one view? We plainly see the fallen, degraded, and helpless condition of humanity. There is evidently something seriously wrong in the very center of the life of the human race. Evil has entered the world, and has a firm grasp on the human heart. Behold in Christ an illustration of the exaltation of humanity! How his wonderful life pleads for the race! What encouragement to us in his victory! How his virtue speaks to us and for us! His life is an intercession for us, an intercession that is not hushed in his death. His life pleads for a possibility of life in us. The significance of his life of purity, of perfect obe-

dience to divine law, of complete resignation to the divine will, of oneness of will and purpose with the Father, of unruffled communion with the Father, is more than example; it is intercession.

The intercession of the life of the Son of God on earth was indeed crowned with the intercession of his death. The presence of his crucified humanity in heaven continues the intercession of his suffering but perfected life on earth. We say that the very nature of things in earth and in heaven declare the life of Jesus to have been intercessory. The holiness of God and the sinfulness of men; the conflict of divine mercy and divine justice; the representative character of the first man, and the representative character of Jesus Christ; the fall of Adam and the triumph of Christ, alike involving principles touching humanity,—all indicate our interest in the life of Jesus interceding for us. The life of Jesus was of the nature of sacrifice for humanity. He poured out his life unto death for us. He made himself, for a time, of no reputation for us. He made his soul an offering for us. He was wounded from the beginning to the end of his ministry for our transgressions.

Jesus is the Lamb of God that takes away the sin of the world—a lamb in his innocence and in his sacrifice. He is the High Priest of sinning humanity, who offered himself on the cross on Calvary. He ever liveth to make intercession for us. May not the divine justice and mercy and love be studied

throughout the intelligent universe filled with the history of Christ, in the light of the life consummated in the one divine tragedy on Calvary?

Grace of God comes to a penitent, believing soul because of the victory of the Son of God. There is encouragement to pray in the name of Christ. Our Savior once said to his immediate disciples, just before the significance of his death was unfolded: "Hitherto ye have asked nothing in my name; ask that ye may receive, and that your joy may be full." There is relief for a sin-troubled heart asking forgiveness for the sake of Him "who loved us and gave himself for us."

The ground of the trust of a soul hungering and thirsting for righteousness is in what Jesus, the Son of God, *is*, and in what he has done. Having the Christ-manifestation of God, a token of atonement, a pledge of divine grace, a trusting heart realizes a peaceful or a joyous persuasion of Divine forgiveness. Is not this persuasion of forgiveness the "witness" of the Holy Spirit in the trusting soul? The gospel throughout indicates that God answers trust. The Divine Spirit's answer to trust changes the heart of a man.

The manifested love of God, borne as upon the wings of the Holy Spirit flying like a gentle dove to the heart, is God's response to our trust. There are two representative passages of the Word of God which are remarkably correlative. They are: "Being justified by faith, we have peace with God,"

and "The love of God is shed abroad in our hearts by the Holy Spirit which is given unto us." And then, as if blending the two, we have: "The Spirit itself bears witness with our spirit that we are the children of God." The passages quoted indicate currents of divine thought concerning those who with the heart believe unto righteousness.

A regenerating love accompanies the trust that apprehends the forgiveness of sin. It is love in the holy presence of the Spirit of God. It is a heavenly benediction to the trusting soul. What a spiritual revelation, what an opening into a new world, what a new and noble impulse of life, what an uplifting of the soul above its unrest, is the first marked love of God with a Christ-like love of mankind! Wondrous kindling in the soul of a fire of love!

In the new birth of the soul, characterized by love divine, there is a baptism of the Spirit of God inducting or initiating the believing man into the kingdom of the Son of God. The scepter of this kingdom is a scepter of righteousness; and the heart that reigns is a God-like heart.

How could Jesus Christ consistently deliver to the sinning heart of humanity any other than the message, "Ye must be born again?" What soul, longing to explore the length, breadth, height, and depth of divine love, will angrily dispute about the interpretation of the message? There is, it is true, a mystery in the message, but it is no less nor more than the mystery of love. We did not reason our-

selves into this natural world. We can not reason ourselves into the spiritual world of Christ. We must be born into it—we must breathe its spirit. Christ says, "Ye must;" but it is not the expression of arbitrary authority, but of eternal fitness.

The presence of the Christian religion among men on earth creates a hungering in the hearts of men. This is right. When a man once hungers for righteousness he feels that he ought to hunger—that he owes it to the capacity of his spirit to hunger. It is a restlessness that is of God. It causes him to look for an era in the experience of his soul. Jesus speaks truly when he says, "Blessed are they that hunger and thirst after righteousness," for such have come within the sphere of God's richest grace. Earth, air, sea, and sky will yield grace to intellect; chaste art, which has the favor of God, will yield grace to taste; but the Spirit of God will yield grace to faith, springing from the soul wounded by sin and hungering for the righteousness proclaimed by the Son of God. Blessed hunger, that will be satisfied with nothing less than God—that is insatiate until the man can truly say, "God is the portion of my soul!"

How many there are in condition to have in their life a marked beginning of the love of God, if they hunger, and if they will! They can have a conversion of soul. Even though there has been no marked hatred in their hearts; though vice has

not palpably enslaved them, yet a love of God can be so marked in their consciousness—can be so accentuated by the Spirit of the living, loving God—a new life can so clearly begin, that *all* life within them will appear just to begin, and all things put on new significance.

The new love transcends all other loves, glorifies all of them that are worthy, baptizes them with a new spirit, directs them heavenward. It is a love that sanctifies the spirit, and strengthens its capacity for loving whatever is essentially good. You shall know this love by its heavenly purity, its sweetness, and its Christ-likeness. You shall know it by its heavenly beauty. This love lifts you higher into life, and interprets for you the most glorious significance of life. It makes every other love, which it does not in its very nature rebuke, a greater joy for the soul.

The Holy, Divine Spirit inspires the gospel of Christ, and heartily and honestly to accept this gospel involves a conversion to this Spirit. The same Spirit that inspires the gospel must take possession of the soul that accepts Christ, and must shine forth again in some phenomena of Christian life. In whatever soul of man sinfulness has run a marked course, Christian life must begin, if ever, with the love of God inspired by the Holy Spirit, which inspiration may as well be termed conversion of the soul.

XXIV.

RIPE FRUIT.

"BUT that on the good ground are they which, in an honest and good heart, having heard the word, keep it, and bring forth fruit with patience."

There are mature Christians on earth in whose lives the Spirit of the gospel of Christ is victorious. It is true that some human infirmities cling to these lives. It is equally true that these lives manifest to the world a high but not ostentatious degree of communion with that Divine Spirit which has given to the world the religion of Jesus. These are lives that exhibit ripe fruit of the seed of Christ-truth sown in earthly soil.

There are traits of Christian character—such as "joyousness, peacefulness, patience, gentleness, goodness, faithfulness, meekness, temperance, and love"—which are the "fruit of the Spirit," the illustration of the genius of Christianity, and the promise of a pure and better life for humanity. Let us examine these characteristics, one by one, with some degree of honest sympathy. Let us not shrink from them because of our honest self-reproaches. Their spiritual beauty will be a benediction to our souls. They illustrate the undying spirit of the gospel of

Christ. They can not justly encounter the opposition of "natural science," for they are spiritual qualities. They survive any and all critical reconstructions of the gospel. They are not essentially in distracting opposition to the moving spirit of the times in which men live, for the real Christ-spirit is in divine sympathy with all times. These characteristics indicate the divine essence of Christianity, which the deep heart of humanity, once possessing, is reluctant to lose.

There is a *joyousness* which the real Christian experiences by right of his trust in Christ. This is in vivid contrast with the spurious joyousness with which we have seen the gospel misapprehended. It is a joyousness higher than that which the spirit derives from earthly sources—higher because of a diviner faith in a higher world of spiritual beauty, suggested by the Christian idea of holiness—spiritual beauty which is promise of joy forever. This joyousness is like the flow of a divine life, rising above the joy inspired by the things that are seen, heard, handled, here below. It is the joyous rising of the soul, disburdened of its weight of sin—even though not every infirmity is laid aside—into an atmosphere of Christian trustfulness and hopefulness, to view earth with eye of faith in Him who divinely talks of heaven, and brings glad tidings from the bosom of the Father.

We are glad to see how Jesus is making sweet

the deep waters of bitterness, and stirring a deeper joyousness in hearts dissatisfied with fruit of joy plucked from trees of earthly planting. The Lord Jesus Christ leads wandering hearts back to the tree of life planted in the midst of the paradise of God. He turns these wandering hearts back to holy thoughts of immortality; and their gladness, like a healing stream, flows heavenward.

The Christian idea of heaven, associated with salvation, is joy-inspiring. Jesus, with his breathings of heaven, stirs within a soul a just hope of heaven; and the soul rejoices in hope with a joyousness that transmutes earth into a preparatory heaven, gives new significance to symbols of God in earth and sea and sky, retouches with a diviner beauty all things whose superficial beauty it does not dissolve, and responds to the beauty of Christian holiness—a joy forever.

There is a *peacefulness* of the Christian mind which is as the reflection of the religious tranquillity of the mind of Jesus, the Son of God: "Peace I leave with you; my peace I give unto you; not as the world giveth, give I unto you." Do not such words flow as with the soft melody of peacefulness from tranquil depths of the soul of Jesus? They are as the gentlest benediction of the peace of Jesus, verifying the song of angels in the sky, "On earth peace, good-will toward men."

When Jesus says, "Think not that I am come

to send peace on earth," he does not contradict himself; for the benediction of his peace is for hearts that accept him, and that enter into his kingdom of righteousness, peace, and joy in the Holy Spirit. He does not give that peace which is as the "baseless fabric of a dream;" it is not for such a one as Jesus to inject peace into the unwilling, unbelieving souls of men, after the manner of an opiate—to lull the conscience, without saving the soul from sin.

How peaceful the soul divinely poised with the sincerely accepted principles of the religion of Jesus! The guilty conscience is soothed as by a gentle, persuasive voice of divine forgiveness and compassion. Fierce passions are hushed as by the voice of Him whom howling tempest and foaming waves obeyed. Through the darkness of earth's night of sin the anxious heart discerns the Son of God. The soul, alarmed by sin, recognizes, walking the earth, the Prince of Peace, who, with the divine motion of his hand, drives away the fears that trouble the soul.

There is a *patience* that befits the followers of the Lord Christ, while sometimes walking on thorns and feeling the sting of earthly evils. "In the world ye shall have tribulation," is a memorable saying of our Savior, indicating that his sincere followers are to be distinguished rather by the bearing of their souls in the midst of the evils of this life than by any lot of more than ordinary circumstances of

temporal felicity. The hope of "deliverance from this present evil world" is the anchor of the genuine Christian's soul. The "patience of hope" accompanies the "work of faith" and the "labor of love." There is the calmness of a stoicism that calls evil good, that laughs in the pride of strength at pain, that disdainfully looks upon susceptibility to suffering as vulgarity, and that prates of resignation to blind fate. Such is not the "patience of hope" in Christ.

There is a patience of the soul sustained by faith in the revelations of the gospel of Christ. There is a patience that is wedded to the Christian hope of heavenly life. There is a patience which stands by conscience, while conscience distinguishes good and evil. There is a patience that recognizes a personal God who has assigned the human soul a discipline of earthly life preliminary to the life of heaven. This patience is not the imperturbability of stolidity of soul; it is the calmness under provocation, under disappointment, under the unrest of affliction, of a soul susceptible to suffering, and disciplined by the habit of faith in the Lord Christ.

The Spirit of Christ is the sanctifier of every element of real *gentleness* in the conduct of human life. If there be rude and boorish followers of Christ, it is not because the Spirit of Christ is hostile to the amenities of cultured society. The Spirit of God descending like a dove upon the Son of God

is a hint of Heaven's approbation of all that is dove-like in the character of men. Heaven has uttered no anathema against genuine refinement of manners. Whatever culture may do toward producing the gentleman—or gentlewoman, if you please—who is at the same time a Christian, is not beyond the scope of the rightly interpreted spirit of the gospel. It should not be forgotten that Christianity is for the education of the heart, and that the essentially Christian heart may be as a diamond in its rough state, or as a diamond in the richest setting that art can produce. There is a rudeness and harshness of character and of conduct that is not to be charged to the Christian religion, but to the ignorance that fails to understand the dignity and sweetness of character to be found in the religion, and that should properly adorn the Christian profession. The gentleness that becomes more expressive, more apt, by culture, is not to be regarded as foreign to the kingdom of Christ.

How shall we designate the Christian character of *goodness?* What opposition to evil, what likeness to God, what divine benevolence, what effort for the happiness of fellow-men, what fitness for the end proposed by Christ, is indicated by this one, all-embracing term, goodness—God-ness?

When God pronounced man "very good," there was no evil in the world. All was order, after God's appointment. But the earth is not now a

"garden of Eden." By some means earth has been sown with evils. Not everything is good. It can not be denied that there are men on earth positively bad. It is plain that there are other men, comparatively good, who are environed with evil, yet who, with a Christ-like spirit, oppose evil. These good men are not exempt from suffering. They are involved in a fall of man—a fall which involves suffering. They are not freed from temptation, for they are on a moral probation which involves temptation. Nevertheless they are characterized by their opposition to evil—as evil is characterized in the gospel; hence their character of goodness is the essentially Christian character, differing from that assumed character of goodness which, independently of the Christ-truth and the Christ-spirit, attempts to reconstruct social order as if no Christ had divinely appeared to men in time.

Christian opposition to evil is tempered with that love which "thinketh no evil," and which is beautifully illustrated by the outgoing of the heart of Jesus for the good of mankind. It is opposition to evil; yet at the same time it is allied with "whatsoever things are true, whatsoever things are honest, whatsoever things are just, whatsoever things are pure, whatsoever things are lovely, whatsoever things are of good report." It is, in brief, the protest of every Christ-like virtue against the mischief of its opposite—the protest inherent in

the life which illustrates Christian virtue. The patience, the gentleness, the meekness, the temperance, and the love, inculcated by the gospel, are evidently designed to preserve from unnecessary offensiveness the Christian character of goodness in its phase of necessary opposition to evil.

To abstain from evil, to decline to participate in evil, to make less the sum of human sinfulness by withdrawing the consent of one's heart to sin, to draw back habitually from the recognized appearance of evil,—surely all this belongs to the Christian character of goodness. There is much of evil that is under the control of a right will. There is, it is true, a mystery of suffering on earth; there is inevitable suffering,—nevertheless the good man draws back from evil whenever evil appears in the palpable form of sin.

The good man continually increases the sum of human happiness within the sphere of influence of his character and effort. Happy himself in the consciousness of rectitude, he aims to promote the happiness of others in so far as their character will admit of happiness. There is in his heart no evil intention to harm any creature. Justice is enshrined in his soul. No right of another is too insignificant to be regarded as sacred; no creature so debased as to be supposed to have no rights that a Christian man is bound to respect. The love of exact justice exalts and ennobles him. The practice of justice in all the ordinary as well

as extraordinary affairs of life can fail in its object of contributing to the peace and happiness and order of society only as vice foils the noble aim of justice among men and blunts the soul's recognition and appreciation of essential goodness; and even when vice interferes with the good man's intention, and a sense of injury stings his heart, *mercy* lingers in his breast. He is reminded of God's long forbearance. He despises not the riches of God's goodness and forbearance and long-suffering, knowing that the goodness of God has led him to repentance, and that while he repented not it was of God's mercy that he was not consumed. Benevolence continually enlarges the good man's heart, as if God were living in him. He repeats to the hearts of his fellow-men Heaven's proclamation, "Good-will toward men." He illustrates this good-will in deeds of love, mercy, and kindness; in sacrifices for the sake of peace; and in the contributions of his heart, his brain, his hands, to the welfare of men.

That faith in God which is represented in the gospel as inspired and assisted by the Spirit of God, and results in a spirit of obedience to the Divine will, is the basis of a *faithfulness* among men which we believe to be most consonant with the will of God concerning human society.

The God of the Bible is He who is represented as keeping his covenant forever. He is the "faith-

ful Creator" to whom men are urged to commit the keeping of their souls in well-doing. It is a precious idea of God we have in his declaration, "I will establish my covenant between thee and me, and thy seed after thee in their generations, to be an everlasting covenant, to be a God to thee and to thy seed after thee." The divine character of faithfulness, in all the various views we have of it in the Scriptures, gives us an idea of that faithfulness which should characterize men in all their just relations in society on earth. God's promises do not fail in vitality nor swerve in process of verification through what seems to the minds of men the slow revolution of a thousand years; the stamp of the resources of eternity is in the promises of our God.

It is not faithfulness toward God alone, the strict observance of religious rites, the use of means of divine grace, but also faithfulness toward men, that completes the character of a faithful Christian—a faithful man. The man who seals his promise with his honor, and whose honor is his passport, often, even among dishonorable men; the man who makes a sacrifice to make good his word or to keep his promise; the man who is true to the obligation that friendship creates; the man who does not betray the confidence he has invited and accepted; the man who is trustworthy, even to the extent that his delicate sense of honor forbids his fracturing the slightest seal which guards a cherished secret, though he may know that it would yield him a great ad-

vantage, — this man exemplifies the faithfulness that is humanly divine.

Jesus, who, under provocation and injury, exhibited no malicious anger and no spirit of revenge, while, at the same time, he was a spirited reformer and by no means lacking in moral heroism and daring, exemplified that admirable quality of soul which we call *meekness*. Happy the man who rules his own spirit. His soul does not fret to injure any living creature. Malice and wrath do not leap in flames from his heart. His tongue is not set on fire of hell. If just indignation arouses his soul, it does not degenerate into spitefulness; on the contrary, it but fitly asserts the genuine greatness and goodness of his character.

The exact opposite of a revengeful spirit is the disposition to return good for evil. It is a disposition that must be cultivated—if cultivated successfully—in the spirit of the gospel of Christ. Meekness exalts the character of a man. It evinces his faith in the ultimate ascendency of good, his faith in virtue that shall survive the present disorder of society, his faith in the justness of Divine Providence. The reckless disposition to return evil for evil tends to perpetuate the disorder of society. Christ interposes a check to this disorder by inspiring in some souls the magnanimity of goodness. The gospel indicates the right starting-point for a better order—for *the* better order of society.

The meek Son of God has outrun all philosophies that have started out to hold mankind in a nobler career of goodness, and have been baffled by the inveterate demand of evil for evil. This Son of God has searched deeper than men's codes of honor. Shall not his divine goodness at least win his enemies?

Let us see what it is that underlies that *temperance* which is numbered among the cardinal virtues of the Christian character. It is moral self-control. Man was not created to be no more than an animal forever. He is to rise above the domination of his flesh. His animal propensities are to be tempered by a Christian spirit. He has a Master above him, it is true; but he is also to be a master to himself, within himself. What self-control was manifested in the case of those persons who at the first were converted from "drunkenness" and "revelings" to the sobriety of the gospel! What a transition from the debauchery of paganism, even to the crudest form of Christian character! What a decisive advance in character was made! What paganism of intemperance yet remains in Christendom! What subjection to uncontrolled appetites! The gospel does not relax its denunciation of barbarism in low social life nor of barbarism in high social life. Christ aims to draw men upward into a sphere of self-control.

The world is to-day witnessing an experiment of

national self-control, and the Christian's hope of the success of the experiment is in that personal self-control the animating principle of which is the Spirit of Christ. What we call *sobriety*, as the opposite of the vice of the inebriate, is but one among various phases of Christian self-control.

Observe how the souls of many are intoxicated with debasing pleasures, with temporary gain, with the breath of popular applause, with the atmosphere of high places of worldly honor, with brief authority,—then "let your moderation be known unto all men." Then your zeal shall be calmly tempered; your pleasures shall be subordinated to your duties to God and men; your gains shall not fill your soul with wants; your ambition shall not make you restless.

To attain unto the maturity of a *love* like Christ's is fully to accept Christ's gospel. Whatever of mystery there is in complete Christian character is the mystery of love. Love is an experience of the soul by which the soul is transformed. The quality of the love determines the transformation. The real Christian loves God in the character in which God is revealed in the gospel of Christ. He sees nothing unamiable in God. He contemplates the divine attributes with a sympathy that glorifies his life. In the very midst of the awful manifestations of omnipotence the servile fear of his soul is cast out. His grateful heart recognizes

the divine mercy; responds with joy to the divine goodness; shrinks not from God, who has searched him and knows him altogether; and is comforted by the Divine Presence. It is the love springing from that heroic trust which was once thus expressed: "Though he slay me, yet will I trust him."

The hearts of men have been wounded and soiled by the sin of hatred. Christ is to the world a signal of good-will. The most precious interests of human society depend upon mutual good-will. Kindness must prevail, envy must be effectually shamed, selfishness must be banished from the heart, before we shall see clearly the glorious design of the gospel of Christ. The love—in other words, the good-will—of many, illumined by the Spirit of Christ, is nevertheless greatly embarrassed by the malevolence that lingers yet in the hearts of men. Every man experiences difficulty in rendering practical the theory of Christian good-will which his mind receives and admires. There is all around us the clashing of human infirmities. There is constant failure of seeing eye to eye. We do not stand as yet on one common plane of light. Our thoughts of God and men are not as yet in parallel lines.

Christ, with loftiest spiritual thought for the good of mankind, was wounded in the darkness that comprehended not his divine love. The ad vent of the Son of God was in a certain sense an

anachronism; but so it would have been if it had been delayed a thousand years. The leaven of his love is working in the bosom of humanity. The example of his good-will to men becomes more and more conspicuous.

Heavenly seed of Christ-truth sown in earthly soil—gospel of the Son of God—glad-tidings from afar—through what vicissitudes on earth it has passed, to fill with light, love, and life souls that thirst for God! What a Spirit has inspired this gospel! What a rift in the sin-clouds hanging over earth it has made! The hope of spirit-immortality glows with a new and diviner light. This gospel is the light of love, shining from the Fatherhood of God upon the brotherhood of men. It assigns eternal significance to love. Through this gospel of the Son of God a heaven dawns in the consciousness of the believing, obedient, aspiring soul.

O Truth of God, manifested through Jesus, the Messiah, we would forever behold thy fadeless glory!

THE END.

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